

4455.9.36

*The Parable of the Ten
Virgins.*

Being SIX

S E R M O N S

PREACH'D at the

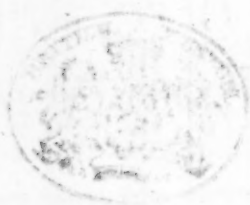
*King's Weigh-House in
Eastcheap.*

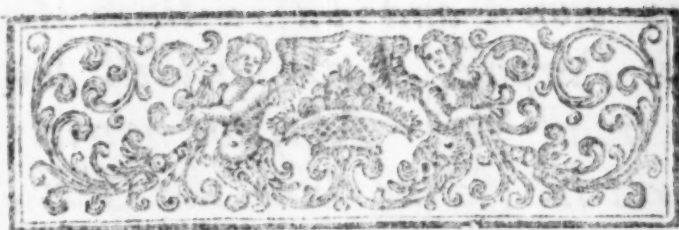
By JAMES WOOD.

*Published at the Request of several
of the Hearers.*

L O N D O N ;

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To my FRIENDS at
the *King's Weigh-house*,
under the Pastoral
Care of the Reverend
Mr. *REYNOLDS*.

Especially those at whose De-
fire the following Sermons
are made publick.

GENTLEMEN,



THESE Discourses were
prepar'd with a View
to your Edification ;
and the Reasons you
gave me to believe, that God
A 2 had

4 Dedication.

had own'd and bless'd them to this Purpose, have yielded me no small Joy. May we heartily agree in giving him the Glory, from whom the Increase cometh. As nothing is more the Reverse to my natural Temper, so nothing was more remote from my Design, than appearing thus publickly in the World. Your affectionate Importunities, join'd with the Desire of one so particularly dear to me, as your Reverend Pastor, have overcome me; and I content myself with this honest Apology. I have often review'd with Wonder, and Thankfulness, the Providence which has brought us together, and not only united our Hearts in the Bonds of the sincerest

Dedication. 5

*sincereſt Friendſhip, but in the
Design of ſerving your Souls,
to the uttermoſt, in the Miniſtry
we have received. And it
muſt add to the Pleaſure to ob-
ſerve, that the Harmony is com-
pleat; and that as we ſpeak
the ſame things, we can behold
you to be of one mind. May
the Reliſh you had of the fol-
lowing very plain Sermons when
they came from the Pulpit, be
continued and increaſed by their
being put into your hands; and
your Hopes ſucceed beyond my
Expectation, as to their more
general Uſefulneſs. I have
learned to deſpiſe the Flurts and
Cavils of unhallowed Wits;
(none of theſe things ſhall
move me) and my End is an-*

6 Dedication.

*swer'd, if such are served by
them, who can discern the
things of the Spirit of God.
May my remaining Work among
you, thro the Divine Blessing,
advance in you Holiness of
Heart, and further you in your
Preparations for Life eternal.*

*This is, and shall be the un-
feigned Prayer of,*

GENTLEMEN,

Your most Respectful

and Obliged Servant,

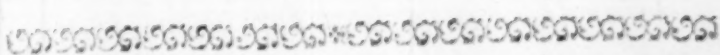
Grays-Inn-Lane,
Sept. 12. 1721.

James Wood.



S E R M O N I.

The Folly of being meer Professors.



MATT. XXV. from the Beginning
to the End of the 13th Verse.

*Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven
be likened unto ten Virgins, which
took their Lamps, and went forth
to meet the Bridegroom.*

*And five of them were wise, and
five were foolish.*

*They that were foolish took their
Lamps, and took no Oil with
them :*

*But the wise took Oil in their Ves-
sels, with their Lamps.*

*While the Bridegroom tarried, they
all slumber'd and slept.*

*And at Midnight there was a Cry
made, Behold the Bridegroom com-
eth, go ye out to meet him !*

*Then all those Virgins arose, and
trimmed their Lamps.*

*And the foolish said unto the wise,
Give us of your Oil, for our Lamps
are gone out.*

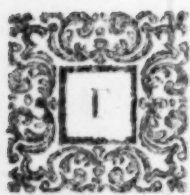
*But the wise answered, saying, Not
so; lest there be not enough for us
and you: but go ye rather to them
that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

*And while they went to buy, the
Bridegroom came, and they that
were ready, went in with him to
the Marriage, and the Door was
shut.*

*Afterward came also the other Vir-
gins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to
us.*

*But he answered and said, Verily,
I say unto you, I know you not.*

*Watch therefore, for ye know neither
the Day nor the Hour, wherein
the Son of Man cometh.*



THAT the Parable I have read, is a Continuation of our Saviour's Discourse, and not a new Head of Doctrine, appears from the Manner in which it's introduced. **THEN** shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened to ten Virgins, &c. i. e. at the Time I have been speaking of. What that

Time

Time was, may be discern'd without difficulty, upon our carrying back our Views towards the Close of the preceding Chapter. We find there, that our Lord had not only intimated the Certainty of a future Judgment, in respect of the thing *itself*; but asserted the Uncertainty of the Day and Hour in which the Son of Man should come, in respect of us. He tells his Disciples how advantageously it would surprize such Ministers, and private Christians, whom this Day should find busy'd, as became the Expectants of the Judgment, tho Multitudes (clothed with both these Characters) should abuse its apprehended Distance to Security and Licentiousness: whom Death should place at the Bar, when they were least thoughtful about it, the Day of Judgment being equally near them, as the Day of Death. This is the Time refer'd to, in the following Parable.

The Scope of it I take to be this, *viz.* to press upon his Disciples, in the most effectual manner, the Duty of Watchfulness, which he had been recommending in the Chapter foregoing.

Before I enter upon the particular Explication of this Parable, let me observe to you, that these Allegorical Discourses being design'd to instruct us in heavenly things, by Images taken from earthly ones, to communicate some Doctrine, or urge some Duty

fitly explain'd, or recommended by such Allusions, our principal View should be to the Scope and Drift of a Parable. Many things in it may be inserted purely for Ornament's sake, to beautify and compleat the Allegory; it is not therefore our Business to find a Meaning to every minute Circumstance, but to attend to the Lesson which offers itself to our Thoughts from its most substantial Parts. Watchfulness, as opposed to Intemperance, is enjoin'd in the former Chapter: the same Duty, but consider'd in opposition to Security, and as consisting in a Readiness to meet with Christ at Death, and in Judgment, is enforced upon the Disciples, in this.

The Parable which is here instituted by our Lord, was the more easily taken in by his Auditory, because it proceeds upon a Custom of an antient standing among the *Jews*, which they observed in their Marriage-Solemnities. I'll give you as distinct an Account of this Affair, as is needful for enlightning the Subject.

The Night was the usual time observed both by *Jews* and *Romans*, for celebrating their Marriage-Rites. The *Romans* had their Torches, called *Teda*, from the pitchy kind of Tree of which they were made; and the *Jews* had their Lamps. Among the *Jews*, the Bridegroom had a certain Number of young Men, who attended him to the

the House of the Person he had espoused. These perhaps were the *thirty Companions* which *Sampson* had *to be with him*, when he marry'd the *Philistine's* Daughter at *Timnath*, *Judges* xiv. 11. They are called by our Saviour, *the Children of the Bridechamber*, *Matt.* ix. 15. and *the Friends of the Bridegroom*, *John* iii. 29. The *Bride-Maids*, who were ordinarily ten in number, having notice of the *Bridegroom's* coming, went out with lighted Lamps to meet him, and to conduct him and his *Train* to the betrothed Party. And as it was the Duty of their Place for these *Virgins* to wait the *Bridegroom's* time, however late his coming might be; so upon his and his *Companion's* entering the House, *the Door was shut*.

I told you, that Watchfulness, as opposed to Sloth and Slumber, and as consisting in an Expectation of *Christ's* coming, and Preparedness to meet him, is the Point about which he is solicitous to impress the Minds of his *Disciples*. To effect this the better, he supposes such a Marriage as I have now described; and that out of the *ten Virgins* who were to attend the *Bridegroom*, five only were so provident as to lay in a Stock of Oil, that might feed their Lamps, however tedious the *Bridegroom* might be in his coming: the other five being thoughtless about the matter, and so the Oil they had, wasted, and their Lamps out, before
he

he came. Starting out of the *Slumber*, to which they had given way, upon his *tarrying*, thro the Alarm of the Bridegroom's Approach, they are in great Consternation: try to get a Recruit, but too late; for they had Oil to buy, when they should have had it to use. While they are thus busy'd, such as were ready enter the House with him, and there is no room for them. They are treated as unworthy of the Honour, about the securing which they had express'd so scandalous an Indifference.

I shall make no other Application of this Parable, than as it shall come in my way, in discoursing upon these Propositions following; *viz.*

Prop. I. That among such as make a Profession of Christianity, very many are but meer Professors. *Five* only out of the *ten Virgins had Oil in their Vessels*, and no more enter'd at last with the Bridegroom into the Marriage, tho they all went out to meet him. *They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*

Prop. II. That the Truth of Grace infers not an absolute Freedom from Infirmities. It may sometimes be said of *wise* as well as *foolish Virgins*, that they *slumber and sleep.*

Prop. III. That Christ often comes to our particular Judgment, in that very Season wherein

wherein we least looked for him. *At Midnight there was a Cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!*

Prop. IV. That it is to be with us to Eternity, according to the State and Condition Christ finds us in at his coming. *They that were ready went in with him to the Marriage; the unready had the Door shut against them for ever.*

Prop. V. That our being left in the dark about the time of our Death, and the Judgment-Day, while assur'd of the Certainty of both, should be a sufficient Motive to our Watchfulness, *that we may be found in Peace. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

We begin with the

Ist Prop. which was this, *viz.* That among such as make a Profession of Christianity, very many are meer Professors. You may observe, that not one of the Persons of whom our Lord does here make mention, appear'd to be a Libertine; *to live without God in the World, and as if under no Law to Christ.* He tells us, that all the *ten* were *Virgins*, *i. e.* Persons separated from the rest of Mankind by a credible Profession of Christianity; and such as seem'd to have escaped the gross Corruption and Pollution that is in the World thro Lust.

The

The ten set out, as if agreed in the same Design, of *meeting the Bridegroom*. They profess to believe a future State, and that their main Errand into this World, is to get ready for the Enjoyment of a better. Carrying their *Lamps*, was telling Mankind, that they would be accounted the Friends of Christ; and that if a little Service might suffice, they would reflect a Lustre upon their Profession by some good Works. Thus far do even such go, whom we find in the Sequel of the Parable to be *Castaways*. They make a gay shew in the *Flesh*; but could Christ say to them (as he does) *I know you not*, had they been Partakers of his *Grace in Truth*? Or could they have been everlastingly banished Heaven, supposing them to have been Christians indeed, without violating that Covenant, which is represented as *well order'd in all things, and sure*? What is said of them, proves that they made a Profession; and what happen'd to them (as the Issue, and Upshot of their Affairs) that they were meer Professors. As a Warning to Hypocrites and Formalists in all succeeding Ages, our Lord transmits the Memory of these Persons to Posterity, branded with the Imputation of the most egregious *Folly*. He enters them upon Record as *foolish Virgins*.

Before I leave this Head, it may not be amiss to spend a few Thoughts for settling the Particulars following; viz.

1st, To

1st, To shew you whence it is that any are influenced to take up a Profession of Religion, and reach no further.

2dly, To expose their *Folly* who have *Lamps* only, *without Oil in their Vessels*, or take up with a *powerless Form of Godliness*.

1st, Let me shew you whence it is that any take up a Profession of Religion, who live and die meer Professors. And,

I. In some this Profession is taken up, purely tho the Influence of *Education*. Tho it is not universally true without any Exceptions, yet that Maxim of the Wise Man's will generally hold, *viz. Train up a Child in the Way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*, Prov. xxii. 6. Were this Question put to many in the professing World, *What is the Reason of your Hope? Why do you name Christ's Name upon you? Why chuse your Lot with God's despised People? Or adhere to Christians distinguish'd by this or t'other particular Denomination?* The Substance of their Reply would be resolv'd into this, *viz. We were brought up this way, this was the Religion of our Forefathers, and we act as we had them for Examples.* A Conviction of the Truth of Christianity, is not the Spring of their Profession; or God's owning and blessing this way of worshipping him, more than another, the Motive to their embracing it. It is by Accident that such as these own
Chri-

Christianity in any Form ; for had their Ancestors been Libertines, it is not improbable that they would be so too, all whose Religion is founded in a Family-Precedent.

Now, tho' we thus retain the Influence of Education, and by being descended from those who truly fear'd God, may be secur'd against downright Profaneness, or engag'd to take upon us a Profession of Religion ; yet since the saving Grace of God comes not to us in the way of natural Descent, since they cannot derive *to us a Divine Nature*, who are the means of communicating to us this corrupt Nature, it is plain that, thro' the force of Education, I may be a Christian in Appearance, without having taken one Step in the way of Life : *My Voice may be Jacob's, and my Hands Esau's* ; I may have a *Lamp without Oil, and be dead while I live*. 'Tis an Happiness to proceed from such as have been God's covenanted Servants, a Privilege to have enjoy'd an early pious Education ; but real Christianity is somewhat more than all this, and may be separated from it : Therefore altho' this may make me a *Professor*, it may leave me very short of a *Christian* ; it may *wash the Outside of the Platter, while the Inside is full of native Impurity and Corruption*.

2. As Education gives the Rise to some Mens Profession of Religion, so others set out at the Instance of natural Conscience, startled,

Serm. I. *meer Professors.*

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startled, but not *savingly convinced*. They may have gone on in an habitual Neglect of God, and *the things which belong to their Peace*, thro' a large part of Life, without Disturbance: the Matters of their Souls, Religion, and another World, what have occasioned them but few serious Thoughts. At length some afflictive Dispensation of Providence rouzes the sleeping Lion, and the *Time of Adversity* calls the thoughtless Creature to *consider*; Eccl. vii. 14. It may be that the Hand of God has arrested his *Person*; having the Sentence of Death in himself, and Eternity unveiled to his Mind, he is neither sparing in his *Censures* upon his past Folly, or his *Promises* of Reformation for time to come. All this may flow from *meer Nature*, which recoils at the Apprehension of Evil, and by an Instinct, that is essential to it, dreads a Dissolution. The Event verifies this Remark; the Man recovers, and thinks that he has *paid his Vows*, and done whatever might be expected in his Case, upon his abandoning the former Extravagancies of Life, and putting on a Face of Religion. He goes on in this *vain Shew*, his Heart as much as ever estranged from the quickning sanctifying Virtue of the Religion he professes: he was *frighted*, but not *convinc'd*; and tho' *reform'd*, is not *converted*: whereas real Christianity consists, not in our being *mended* only, but *unmade*; for whoever

ver is in *Christ Jesus* (and none else are Christians) *he is a new Creature*; 2 Cor. v. 17. he is *renatus*, a new Creation; all old things are passed away, and every thing is become new. Afflictions may put such, as have stood idle all the Day long, upon bodily Service; but between this and real Christianity, the Difference may be as great as between the Shadow and Substance, a dead Image and a living Man. Is it strange then that these tho' *Professors*, should be no more than Professors, when they have taken up their Religion in a Fright, not from an inward Persuasion of its Reasonableness, Excellency, Beauty, and exceedingly great Rewards?

3. A Regard to *Reputation* may lie at the bottom of some Mens Religion, and nothing higher influence their Profession. They are not Christians even in *Name*, but upon a Principle of *Honour*: *Conscience* has no Concern in this part they act in Life. What *God* will think of them, comes not into the Question; tho' they may not want Solicitude about the good Opinion of the *World*. These low little Views have Men conducted themselves by, ever since *Christ* had a Church. The Evangelist *John* observes of some of the chief Rulers of the *Jews*, that notwithstanding they were convinc'd of the Truth of the Christian Religion, yet a Regard to their *Reputation* prevented their owning and embracing it. They stuck to the

the Religion that was most in vogue, and would continue of the Jewish Church rather than be looked upon as out of the fashion. His words are these, *Among the chief Rulers many believed on Jesus, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God:* John xii. 42, 43. Men may reckon it a sort of *Brand* they fix upon themselves, that while so many of their Friends and Acquaintance are Persons famed for exemplary Piety, they do not so much as *pretend* to be Christians. A Regard to the good Opinion of others does therefore carry them such Lengths, as it was never in the power of other Motives to do; and the Love of a good *Name* prevails, where all Sense of Duty to God, or the Tenderness they owe to an immortal Soul, could not. Now is it to be imagined that these will be any better than *meer Professors*, whose highest Aim is at popular Applause? This (you know) is attainable in a Consistency with their being utterly unacquainted with *pure and undefiled Religion*.

4. It is to be feared, that an Eye to *Secular Advantage* is the main influencing Principle in some Mens Professions of Christianity. A mercenary Regard to the *Loaves* may be the sole Reason of their thus far following Christ. There was a large number of People mingled with his Disciples, called him.

him Rabbi, pursued him over the Sea of Tiberias to Capernaum, whose appearing Reverence for our Lord, he himself tells us had no nobler Motive than the satisfying an hungry Belly. See John vi. 26. *Jesus answered them, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the Miracles, but because ye did eat of the Loaves, and were filled.* And the Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, mentions a very odd sort of Christians, who supposed that *Gain was Godliness*, 1 Tim. vi. 5. Their Design in appearing religious, was to get *Money* by the Shew; and if this End be attained by it, they'll put on any Form, or act any Part. Many listed under our Lord's Standard, joined his Retinue, while the Prospect of a Temporal Kingdom prevailed among them, who turned their Backs upon him, and *walked no more with him*, upon their apprehending that he was to be a *suffering Saviour*. It were to be wished that so vile a Spirit had been peculiar to the Infant-State of Christianity; but what reason to fear that some in our day have professed Religion as a *Cloke for their Covetousness*, the better to insinuate themselves with Mankind, and by defrauding and over-reaching others to increase their own Abundance? Now how splendid soever that Profession, with how much soever of Exactness and Severity it may seem to be attended; can these be any other than mere Professors

Professors of the Religion of Jesus? *Do Grapes grow upon Thorns, or Figs upon Thistles? Can they be at once the Members of Christ, and the Members of an Harlot? Or truly serve two such contrary Masters, as God and Mammon?*

But we shall carry this Thought further, under the next Particular, and it is all that we shall offer upon this Head.

5. Some take up a Profession of Religion as a Cover for the most detestable *private Wickedness*. The Apostle *Paul*, in his Epistle to *Titus*, gives us a dismal Account of some Judaizing Christians in the Church. Their Profession was specious, their Practice diabolical. *They professed to know God, (says he) but in Works they deny'd him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good Work reprobate,* Tit. i. 16. Men may affect to appear like *Saints*, that they may behind the Curtain act the *Atheist*, both unobserv'd and unsuspected: may make *long Prayers*, to devour the *Widow's House*, and more securely wallow in all manner of Sensuality. To such a dreadful degree as this has the Devil help'd some to affront the Almighty, and impose upon the Credulity of his People.

These are all *Virgins* to the Eye of the World; their *Profession* makes them so: tho I have shewn you their *Motives* to this Profession are very different. One sets out
upon

upon the Turn of Mind received by *Education*. Another in complaisance to the Solicitations of an awaken'd *natural Conscience*. This Man, because it's *fashionable* to own Christianity. Another makes it a *Cloke for his Covertness*. Nay, some are desperate enough to appear *openly religious*, with a view to their Security as to *private Wickedness*.

The Scriptures warrant us in the Draught I have given of the different Principles upon which Men *profess* Christianity: and the Affair I promised to adjust, is by this time sufficiently plain, when I undertook to shew you how so many engaged in a Profession of Christianity, who never reach'd further than to be meer Professors.

2dly, Let me now illustrate the Justice and Propriety of our Saviour's Remark, when he calls all who are Professors only, *foolish Virgins*. Their Folly will appear upon our comparing *Profit* and *Loss*: Laying the *Gain* they have made in one Scale, and the *Damage* they have sustain'd in another. *What is the Hope of the Hypocrite* (the Formalist, the Deceiver, the meer Professor) *tho he has gain'd, when God taketh away his Soul?* Job xxvii. 8. Allowing him *q. d.* to have secur'd whatever was within the compass of his most extravagant *Hopes*, what a Trifle is it for which to plunge a Soul into *Perdition and Destruction?* Tho he should

gain

gain the World (saith our Lord) which is more than the most aspiring or avaritious Mind could propose to itself, *what is he profited?* Is he not a Loser, if an immortal Soul is barter'd away, for a corruptible perishing World? *Mat. xvi. 26.* Is *Reputation* what you aim at, securing a good Report of all Men? Admitting that herein you have your Reward, what is this, if compared with the Scorns and Repreaches of God Almighty? What is your being the World's Favourite for a few Days, if he pronounce you accursed for ever? Have you supposed *Gain to be Godliness?* Granting that you have attain'd your End, is this to be laid in the Ballance against the durable Riches, the Weight of Glory, which have had an inferior Interest in your Regards? Was sinning in Secrecy (without Suspicion or Disturbance) what you desir'd? Besides that there is no being private from God, *What are the Pleasures of Sin, which last but for a moment,* viewed with the sublime Pleasures at God's Right-hand for evermore? What egregious Folly to purchase short-liv'd Satisfaction, at the expence of suffering Horrors without end?

But I shall illustrate the Point more particularly in the three following Instances;
viz.

1. Such practically prefer living *hated* of God, to living in his favour: this proclaims

claims their *Folly*. A Christian, as he is a *Partaker of God's Likeness*, is the Object of his *Love*. To be loved of God, includes in it whatever can make up a Felicity that is compleat. He who *requires Truth in the hidden part*, has mark'd out Hypocrites, as the most odious of Sinners; as most remote from himself, and offensive to him. Now, he who is a Professor only, is an Hypocrite: he cheats the World, and would deceive even God himself. Such Wretches may *blefs themselves*, good Men, who are still fallible, may honour them; but God's *Soul leaths them*. And how very uneligible the Circumstance, to live under the settled Abhorrency of a Foe that's powerful to Omnipotence? Your Practice, Hypocrite, declares this to be your Choice, whatever the formal Reasonings of your Mind may be: and that you prefer such an Averfation to any ways in which God might discover his *loving Kindness*, and *tender Mercy*. *Actions* have a Language as well as *Words*. Yours speak thus: and is the Character misapply'd, when *Folly* is inscribed on such a Conduct?

Again,

2. You practically prefer dying *accused*, to dying *in the Lord*: which further exposes your *Folly*. Faith so unites the Christian to his God, that a Separation is impossible even by that Death, which separates between Soul and Body. His Life is

a walking with God, his Death a resting from Labour, and sleeping in Jesus. He who was his Guide to the Grave, does in the very Prospect of it disarm the last Enemy, and support with his Rod and Staff thro the gloomy Vale. When Flesh is fainting, and Heart failing, he is the Strength of his Heart whom he has chosen for his satisfying Portion. An Hypocrite lives abhorred, and dies accursed of God. Death is to him the Executioner of Divine Vengeance; and the meer Professor, is this Hypocrite. He can find no Discharge from that War, nor Assistance in it; but must go thro the Hour, and struggle alone with the Powers of Darkness. Now, how deplorable the Case, to have God look on as an Enemy, when all Creature-Helps are Waters that fail, and Physicians of no value? This you chuse. This your Practice proves to have the Preference with you, to all that a good Man experiences in his last Moments. How palpable the Folly?

Nay how compleatly extravagant? when we remember,

3. That you prefer the Extremity of *Hell-Torments*, to all the Joy, Glory, and *Blessedness of the heavenly World*. A Christian has not fully received the Good purchased and promised by his Saviour, when his Body is lodged in the Grave. All hitherto are rather Preparations for his Happiness,

pineness, and Earnests of it, than the thing itself. His Soul does immediately pass into Glory, to be *swallowed up of that Immortality, and eternal Life, which are brought to light in the Gospel.* And when the Resurrection-State shall have fitted the Body, *which was sown in Corruption,* for a Reunion with a perfected glorify'd Spirit, he shall know in his entire Person, what is contain'd in being *Kings and Priests unto God for ever,* and blessed with *Eternal Redemption.* An Hypocrite is transmitted by Death to the lowest Hell; the Place *where the Worm dies not,* and *where the Fire is not quenched.* Nay, as if a common Damnation came not up to the Malignity of their Guilt, nor did sufficiently express the Displeasure of God against it, the Holy Ghost refers to the Hypocrite's After-State, when he would convey to our Minds the Idea of perfected Misery: *Mat. xxiv. 51.* The meer Professor is this Hypocrite; he chuses to *lie down in devouring Fire,* and to *dwell with everlasting Burnings.* Yes, his Practice testifies, that he looks upon all that Heaven can furnish out, as an Happiness that may strike the Mind, as less to be desired. Thus *he calls Darkness Light, and Light Darkness; Bitterness sweet, and Sweetness bitter.* And what can discover Folly in all its Extravagance, more than the Account with which I have now entertain'd you?

Thus

Thus I have offer'd what I design'd as to the

1st Prop. which was this, *viz.* That among such as make a Profession of Christianity, very many are but meer Professors. I have accounted for the thing, by letting you see the several Springs which may influence to such a Profession, and yet never carry us further; justifying our Saviour's Remark, when he pronounces of all who set out to *meet him with Lamps only, and no Oil*, that they are *foolish Virgins*.

I shall close this Discourse with the following Practical Reflections. Such as,

1st, Let us not draw Conclusions to the Prejudice of Religion, from the Miscarriages of such as profess it. Religion is the greatest Reality; it has a renewing and transforming Vertue: but since a *Professor* and a *Christian* are not convertible Terms, we should rather attribute the Misconduct of those who bear the Christian Name to their Inexperience of the Christianity they profess, than to any Defect in a Scheme which makes all such to be *new Creatures*, who thoroughly embrace it. If all who assume the Character were Christians *indeed*, they would live *soberly, righteously, and godly in the present World*. Consequently the Miscarriages of Professors must be owing to their *Want* of Religion, they have neither

Rise or *Encouragement* from Religion itself. Unfair and inconclusive as this sort of Reasoning is, yet we find that it's *common* as it's *false*. My Text unriddles the Mistake, and accounts for the Fallacy, when it tells us, that many who profess Religion, are *meer Professors*.

2dly, Let what has been said, caution us against resting in an empty Profession of Christianity, however specious or plausible it may be. In respect of the Divine Acceptance, *Circumcision availeth not any thing, neither Uncircumcision, but the new Creature*. All the Blessings of the *Everlasting Covenant* are suspended upon our believing in Christ, accepting him as he has freely offer'd himself in the Gospel, conforming to his Commands, which are *holy, just, and good*: God never told us, we should have an Interest in the Contents of this Covenant, if we did but *profess* all this to the World. And what tho we should be fainted by short-sighted Creatures like ourselves, while God *cannot be deceived; and will not be mocked?* it will be but a little time, and the Mask shall be taken off. At the Tribunal of Christ every Creature shall be manifested, *naked, and open'd*; and how shocking the Thought of our being convicted of *Imposture* there? While others build upon Hay and Stubble, and entertain Hopes which will end in Confusion, may we *build upon a Rock*, that
out

our House may stand, and our Confidence have great Recompence of Reward.

3dly, Bless God, Christian, who has made you a sound Believer, while there are so many Cheats in the professing World. In resigning yourselves to be taught, pardoned, ruled, sanctified, and saved by him, you have abundantly approved your *Wisdom*. You are upon a better bottom than others, have more substantial Encouragements than they, see that your *Righteousness exceeds theirs*. Labour to grow in Grace; and out of the good Treasure of your Heart, to bring forth good Fruit. Then upon his saying in the Language of the Promise, 'Behold I come quickly!' you will be able to echo back again in the Language of Faith and Hope, *Amen, even so come Lord Jesus.*





S E R M O N II.

Infirmities consistent with the Truth of Grace.



WE have shew'd in the foregoing Discourse, that a *Profession* of Christianity may be separate from real vital Religion; and expos'd their *Folly*, who content themselves with a *Name* to live while they are dead, or rest in an empty powerful *Form* of *Godliness*. These Heads take what was intended by the

Ist Prop. laid down from the Text.

We proceed to the

IId Prop. which was this, *viz.* That the *Truth of Grace* does not infer an absolute Freedom from *Infirmities*.

This Observation is founded upon that part of the Parable which informs us, that *while the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumber'd and slept.* The Charge is drawn up in common against the *Wise and Foolish Virgins*; *They All slumber'd and slept.*

It is alike easy in regard of the Divine Power, to form the new Creature at once with the same Perfection it shall attain to in Heaven, as to work us up to that Perfection by degrees. When he implants the Principle of a spiritual Life, he could in the same instant give us *the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ*, Eph. iv. 13. It's plain he *can*, because he actually *does* all this in a moment, in the twinkling of an Eye; Sanctification-Work being compleated in the very Article of Dissolution, for every Child of God. But however possible this is in respect of God's Power, yet it is consistent with the Perfection of his Nature, and answers more valuable Ends, that we should grow gradually into an holy Temple to the Lord; our Goodness be as *the Morning Light*, which shines more and more unto the perfect Day. By disposing things into this Order, God provides for the glorifying himself, without the least hazard to our Safety. What an Honour is reflected particularly upon the *Wisdom*, the *Power*, the *Goodness*, and the *Faithfulness* of God, in that so small a Spark is kept alive in the Floods of

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Temptation from without, and Corruption from within? That it out-lives all Opposition? *The smoking Flax not quenched, nor the bruised Reed broken, until Judgment is brought forth to Victory?* Mat. xii. 20. Well tho the Grace of God, where it is communicated in Truth, is an *incorruptible Seed which liveth and abideth for ever*; tho *man* *Water* cannot extinguish this Celestial Fire nor the *Floods* drown it; yet since we are sanctify'd but *in part*, the Presence of Corruption is consistent with the Truth of Grace.

Our Lord pronounces of such whom he allows to have been *wise Virgins* (*wise in Salvation*) that even they had their *slumbering and sleeping* Seasons. If this could not have consisted with real Christianity, is it to be supposed that he would have treated These as his *Children*, welcom'd them to *Heaven* as we know he did? This would be to *give holy things to Dogs*, and to break thro those fixed Rules, by which such Favour as these are suspended, upon our being made *Partakers of a Divine Nature*.

It is probable that this particular Circumstance is left upon Record, tho not as an Encouragement to *Security*, yet as a Preservative against *Despair*. That a Consciousness to our own Weakness might not hurry us into an harsh Judgment of our spiritual State, tho it should be improved

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as a Motive to our walking humbly with God.

I have said thus much, if possible, to disabuse those timorous Christians, whom Satan deceives to their hurt, when he teaches them to infer their being *Hypocrites* and *Cast-aways*, from their *not having already attain'd*, and *their not being already perfect*. They falsely argue from the remaining Presence of Sin, to the Absence of the Grace of God; whereas the most that can be fairly concluded from this State of things, is this, *viz.* That our Grace is weak, when our Corruptions are strong. Such hearty Lamentations on the account of Sin, and earnest Desires of compleat Sanctification, are convincing Proofs of our having Grace in Truth. Strong Cries are as certain a sign of Life, as Laughter and Joy.

May God bless these Hints to the rescuing some mistaken Christian out of this Snare of the Devil.

The Heads upon which I shall enlarge, in pursuing the Subject, are these which follow; *viz.*

1st, I shall endeavour to explain the Charge summ'd up in these few words, *They all stumbled and slept*. Shew you what this signifies, as it is brought against a real Christian; and what it may import, as affirm'd of a meer Professor. It lies against both wise

and foolish Virgins at once, but signifies differently, as applied to the one, and to the other.

2dly, We shall examine what is meant by the *Bridegroom's tarrying*, and how this becomes so powerful a Temptation to Secrecy and *Slumber*.

We will then apply this part of the Subject.

1st, I am to shew you what this Character carries in it, that is advanced against both the *wise* and the *foolish Virgins*, when our Lord says of them, that they *slumbered and slept*.

These Phrases, in their general Acceptation, are opposed to that *Watchfulness* so often recommended in the Scriptures, as furthering our Soul's Prosperity. That watchful, lively, and circumspect Attendance on our Work as *Christians*, which adorns the Gospel; and contributes to the Increase of our spiritual Strength, and Peace, and Joy. I Read, to this purpose, 1 *Thess.* v. 6, 7, *Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober, &c.* I need not multiply Authorities. This Explication is supported by our Lord himself in my Text, and he must be allowed to have known his own Meaning. If we compare the Text with the 13th Verse of this Chapter, we will see that he makes the *slumbering and sleeping*

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sleeping of which he speaks, to be the Reverse to that *Watchfulness*, which consisted in a fixed Expectancy of his Coming, and a religious Preparation for it.

But since a truly gracious Person can never come those Lengths in this Guilt, which may be fact as to a meerly nominal Christian, *slumber and sleep* in the same Sense as may be affirm'd of the other; I shall attempt to settle this Point, shew you what we are to understand by it, when it refers to a *Child of God*, and what when it's a Charge against a meer *Hypocrite*.

[1.] When apply'd to a *Christian*, it may intimate such things as these.

(1.) An Abatement of his first Zeal for God. The Soul is filled with lively and very strong Workings of Affection towards God, upon our first Conversion. The Tincture it then receives, and the Biass that is then put upon it, can never wear off; yet, that Love may be at some times suspended in respect of its *Exercises* and *Actings*, that is far from being extinguish'd in regard of its *Principle*. When the Church of *Ephesus* is reprov'd for having *left her first Love*, this Charge refers to Interruptions and Decays as to the Instances in which she had formerly *expressed* her Zeal; it supposes not as if the Love of God were ceased, and had no more place among those famous Professors: *Rev. ii. 4.* Thus God speaks

speaks to *Jerusalem* by the Mouth of the Prophet *Jeremiah*; *I remember thee* (saith he) *the Love of thine Espousals, when thou wentest after me in the Wilderness, in a Land that was not sown*, Jer. ii. 2. q. d. The time was, in which your Love appeared a kind of Transport, and hot as Fire; it could put you upon the most difficult and expensive Service for me; you stuck at nothing that might shew that you loved me with a pure Heart and fervently: Your Love has of late seem'd to wax cold, as to several Instances wherein it did formerly discover itself. And in this Sense may we understand that Profession of the Spouse to Christ, when she says, *I sleep but my Heart waketh*, Cant. v. 2. i. e. tho I appear not to be such a lively zealous Christian as at my first setting out, yet mine Heart is right with God amidst all mine Infirmities. I have Love to God in the Habit, tho it shew not itself as before it did. There is Life in the Root, tho I may be look'd upon as a Tree twice dead.

Who is the Christian against whom Satan has not thus had Power, and prevailed? cleft their Wings? dull'd their Spirits? that comparing the present Evidences and Expressions of their Love to God, with what at other times they have given, they have seem'd to be invaded with a Spirit of Slumber? or overrun even with the Shadow of Death?

(2.) A Child of God may fall from his *first Works*, as well as from his *first Love*, and this be aim'd at when he is said to *slumber and sleep*. The Sloth and Security which began in the *Heart*, may quickly affect the *Life*; and the *Fruit* follow the present Condition of the *Tree*.

There are these two Instances, in which this Drowsiness of Soul towards *Duty* will shew itself; viz.

As this prevails, we shall find,

1. That the *Law of God* will appear less *exceedingly broad*; and the whole of our *Duty* be brought within a narrower Compass than formerly. At first, when Conscience was tender, and *the Love of God did constrain us*, Christ's Yoke was easy, and his Burden light. Christianity, in its utmost Extent, appeared to be a *reasonable Service*. The Convert paid *Tythe of Mint, and Anise, and Cummin*, without neglecting the weightier *Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith*; Mat. xxiii. 23. Duties of a *Personal Obligation* broke not in upon such as were of a *Relative Nature*; nor did the Respect shewn to *Relative Duties*, excuse from such as were more directly *Personal*. *Private Duties* were not allowed as Pleas to the Neglect of *Publick* ones; nor *Publick* made to stand in the place of *Private*. Every Command of God having the same *Authority* to bind it upon Conscience, came effectually recommended

mended to it ; and no Duty appeared to be so little an one, as that it might be overlook'd with Safety. But has not this first Love cooled ? Saran play'd the World upon us with so much Success, that each of us may say with the strictest regard to Truth, *It is not with us as in Years that are pass'd ?* Have not these been our inward Thoughts of many Duties ? such for instance, as daily stated solemn Self-Examination, and communing with our own Heart ; Reading, Meditation, and private Prayer ; (Duties which formerly we durst not omit) *to what purpose is this Waste ?* Mat. xxvi. 8. As spiritual Sloth has grown upon us, we have been apt to say of Attendance to these, and many other religious Services, that 'twas a being *righteous overmuch* ; and have abridged our Christianity, lest it should thwart this Flesh-pleasing Demand ; *Yet a little Sleep, and a little Slumber, and a little more folding the Hands to sleep :* Prov. vi. 10. There are few thorough experienced Christians, whose Case at one time or another I have not now described ; and whenever it has been thus with us, we have been *slumbering sleeping Virgins*.

2. Another Instance in which this *Disorder* of Soul towards Duty will discover itself, is this, viz. we shall by degrees grow careless about the Manner in which we discharge Duty. While the Soul has been

walked

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wakeful and lively, it has had a regard not only to the *Matter of Duty*, but to the *Temper and Frame of Spirit* in which it has been attended to. It has not been enough to yield it Peace upon Reflection, that such and such Services were not omitted, if they have not been *rightly performed*; that Sin has been *confess'd*, if the Soul has not been *humbled and broken* for it; Mercies *acknowledged*, if Love to God has not accompany'd these Acknowledgments; our *Gratitude* been enlarged, and the Soul confirmed in its *Dependance* on God for the future. The Labour of the *Lips* passes not for *Prayer*, when the secret fervent Desires of the *Heart* are not expressed hereby; nor have we acquitted ourselves to our own Satisfaction in *Reading, Hearing, or Meditation*, if God has not been met with in these Duties, by the Soul which *followed hard after him*. We have been *jealous over ourselves with a godly Jealousy*, lest we miss *what above all things we labour'd after*, which is, that *whether present or absent, we might be accepted of God*, 2 Cor. v. 9.

When Security and *Slumber* invade, what *Carelessness* succeeds in the place of our former Caution? What *Lukewarmness* instead of our wonted Zeal? God is put off with the *Lame and Blind for a Sacrifice*, as if it were of little or no consequence how we acted in Religion, so that the Work was done. How often has the World, and the things

things of it, thus entangled, and overcome us? given our Corruptions the advantage, so that when we have not dared wholly to neglect Duty, we have gone about it with that Sluggishness and Indevotion, as if the God *with whom we had to do*, were not a Spirit; or the Service which he required, *Spiritual Worship*. Too frequently have we read, heard, and communicated thus out of Frame; been heedless, lifeless, our Hearts not warm'd in Duty, and (which is worse) *our Sorrow not stirred* for such trifling with a holy God.

In these Instances will the *Drowsiness* of Soul towards Duty, of which we speak, discover itself; viz. it will tempt us to *abridge* our Christianity, lessen the number of Duties to which we are obliged, and make us *heedless* as to the *Manner* of discharging such as we still believe to be Duties.

(3.) *Slumbring and Sleeping*, when apply'd to a Christian, may signify not only *falling from his first Works*, but falling into some gross Sin. Tho' all who have escaped the *Pollutions of the World*, are not again entangled and overcome; yet God has left some such to themselves, that they might see the Evil that is in them, and instead of *being high-minded*, might fear. David and Peter are Monitors of the Frailty of human Nature. Their Story proves, that true Grace may subsist, where there are many and very strong Corruptions;

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ruptions; and that a Soul most wakeful Godward, vigorous, and active, may in a small compass of time be not only in a *slumbring* way, but so thoroughly *asleep*, as that all Action as a Christian ceases. It is but rarely that any are thus surprized, whom God has apprehended as his own; and when they are, such as are born of God do not so sin as others: their Seed abiding in them, they cannot so sin, because they are born of God. I mean, that they cannot sin with the same Consent of Will, with the same Remorselessness upon Reflection, with the same Frequency or Perseverance: *John iii. 9.* Their Slips are accidental, and when they fall, they quickly rise again. 'Tis impossible that they should backslide with a perpetual Backsliding, or draw back to Perdition; they are eventually safe from the Counsel and Covenant of God, and shall be kept to Salvation by his mighty Power.

In these Respects, may even the wise Virgins be said to *slumber and sleep*. They may abate in the Liveliness of their Affection towards God, be less impartial in their Obedience, grow formal and careless in the Manner of discharging Duty, by dropping their Guard, be surprized into presumptuous Sin. Thus far may they decline and miscarry, in whom the Root of the Matter is: Who shall be recover'd by Grace, and glorify'd in Heaven; for these wise Virgins awake from their Slumber, were ready at the
Bride-

Bridegroom's Approach, and went with him to the Marriage.

[2.] I am next to open the Import of these Phrases, as they are applicable to *meer Professors*; for it's observ'd of the *foolish Virgins*, as well as the *wise*, that they *slumbered and slept*.

Considering the Charge as advanced against these *Hypocrites*, it may suggest such things as these.

1. Their forbearing their former Care even to be *thought* religious. 'The *meer Professor* answers all his Ends, by an *outside Show*. He aims at nothing which is not to be secured by his having a *Name to live*. Accordingly, while he acts consistently with himself, *he sits before God, as his People*. *Apes a Christian*; *treading in his Steps* as far as this may be done, and he an *Hypocrite* still. He must be at *some Expende*, tho' it is not *great*, who would *pass* for religious for notwithstanding that our *Hearts* are exempt from the Remarks of the most inquisitive Eye, and are not to be *judged by Man's Judgment*, yet they will form Sentiments of our favour, or otherwise, as we *do* or *do not* keep up the *Face* of Religion. Now when such as were famous for walking in the View of the *World* blameless, tire of this affected *Tenderness* and *Scrupulosity*, instead of that fictitious Zeal by which they deceived many, indulge to a *Coldness*, *Looseness*

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and obvious *Disregard* of what they seem'd to pursue with a *Fervour* of Mind, they may be said to *slumber and sleep*; for they are the Reverse to what they themselves were, while upon the *Watch* for deceiving the World. And considering these Persons as destitute of an inward fixed *Respect* to God, nothing less than which can keep the Soul steady, is it strange if they run into Absurdities in *Practice*? Where nothing higher than a View to *Reputation* makes a Man a *Professor*, can we wonder if in many Instances he should act in *Contradiction* to a Principle, which he may be disposed to alter or *despise* in many Instances?

Tho the *foolish Virgins* of whom our Lord speaks, set out to Appearance with a View to the *meeting the Bridegroom*, it is probable that from a *Regard* to their *ill Management* of this Profession, their *wearying* of the Measures by which it was to be supported with *Credit*, and *Indifferency* about the Reflections of Mankind upon their *Remissness*, he brings them into the Number of such as *slumbered and slept*.

2. There may be intimated in this Charge, that such do throw off the Disguise, and die *Apostates* after a plausible *Profession*. This Interpretation is favour'd by what occurs in the 8th Verse of this Chapter, where it is said of the *foolish Virgins*, that their *Lamps were gone out*. Their *Lamps* may

may signify their *Profession*; the *Bridegroom's Coming*; Christ's summoning them by *Death* to *Judgment*: consequently, their *Lamps* being out at his *Coming*, their dying *Apostates*. Demas carry'd on a *Shew* of Christianity, while it serv'd his purpose, who made Religion but a Means to an End truly *sordid* and *base*; and when it appeared unlikely that he should get any more by the *Name*, he resolves to be no longer called a Christian. He quits the Cause at once, thro a predominant Love to the present *World*, 2 Tim. iv. 10. Christ foretold such a sort of Christians, who for a while should believe, or pretend to believe, but in the time of *Temptation* should fall away, Luke viii. 13. And the Apostle to the *Hebrews* supposes this to be a possible Case, as to such who came many Lengths further, than barely taking up the Christian *Name*; tho he pronounces the Recovery of such to be *impossible*. Some may be enlightened (says he) *taste of the heavenly Gift*, be *Partakers*, in a lower Sense, of the *Holy Ghost*; they may have had a kind of *Relish* of the good *Word* of God, felt the *Powers* of the *World* to come, and yet fall away, so as not to be renew'd again by *Repentance*; Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. This is *slumbring* with a witness, yes, it is *sleeping the Sleep of Death*.

What has been said may suffice for explaining this part of the Subject, in which it's observ'd of both the *wise and foolish* Vir-

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gins, that they slumbred and slept. We have consider'd wherein the Nature of this Charge lies, and what it carries in it as it's advanced against *Christians*, and as it is brought against *Hypocrites*, or *meer Professors*. The different Import of these Expressions, as differently apply'd to the one or the other of them.

This was the First General Head.

2dly, We'll enquire what is meant by the *Bridegroom's tarrying*, and how this comes to be so powerful a Temptation to *Security* and *Slumber*. While the *Bridegroom tarried*, they all *slumbred and slept*.

I might say, that the eternal Son of God did eminently come into our World, when the Word was made *Flesh*, and dwelt among us. As a View to our Good brought him hither, so he left us with a Design of promoting our best Interests. And to compleat that gracious Purpose, he has engaged to come a second time to our Salvation, i. e. solemnly to adjudge us to, and possess us of it. *Heb. ix. 28.* This Vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie; tho it tarry, yet should we wait for it, because it will surely come: *Hab. ii. 3.* But besides the coming of Christ in his *Incarnation*, and his coming upon the Consummation of all things as the Judge of Quick and Dead, the Scriptures hint at another Coming of Christ,

Christ, viz. at Death : which time, to such as it overtakes, is equivalent to the End of the World. Our Lord may have this in his Thoughts, when he speaks of the *Householder's Return from his Journey*, and the *Bridegroom's Coming*; and the Apostle Paul, when he says to the Christian Hebrews, *Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry*; Heb. x. 37.

Now his *Tarrying* intimates the abundant Exercise of his *Patience* towards his Creatures in a Tryal-State : His forbearing to execute Sentence speedily, and call them to give an Account of their Stewardship. And the Text may be design'd to inform us what usually falls out in the Course of things, during such an Interval. The Infirmities of Christians, the Instability and Unsettledness of Hypocrites; the first decline, the other apostatize. This Remark is founded upon the Manner of Expression, that *WHILE the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept*.

But it is not improbable that this *Tarrying of the Bridegroom* is design'd to point us to what they made an Occasion of their Slumber; or what proved, thro' their Abuse of it, a powerful and too effectual Temptation to it.

I'll take it in this light, and endeavour to account for the thing. We may offer this in the

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1st place, That the Matters of Religion appear to be of peculiar *Solemnity* and *Importance*, while they are conversed with under the Apprehension of *approaching Death*. A Man cannot trifle in Duty, be easy with a wandering, confused, or drowsy Spirit, while this Thought is upon his Mind, *viz.* I am nearer the End of my *Work*, and as near my *Reward*; these Duties will be called over in *publick* a very *short* while hence, either to my *Praise* or *Confusion*, as I have been *heartty* in what I have done, or attended the Work of the Lord *negligently*. A meer *Hypocrite*, who is in the *Gaul* of *Bitterness*, and *Bond* of *Iniquity*, even He will keep up his *Profession*, and abound in *external Services*, while his Mind feels the Force of this awful *Thought*. Add,

2. That this World, and the Things of it, have a vast advantage over us, when we believe that our Lord *has defer'd his Coming*, and *put the evil Day far from us*. As we never converse so *safely* with things *seen and temporal*, as when we do it, persuaded that we shall quickly leave them; so it is scarce possible but that they should *injure* us, when we have to do with them under the prejudice of this false Reasoning: *Where is the Promise of his Coming?* For since the *Fathers fell asleep*, all things continue as they were, *from the Beginning of the Creation*: 1 Pet. iii. 4. This represents the Objects which

which surround us in a false Light, deceive them with enchanting Charms; the Master goes after them with a sort of restless Desire, as if there were an *Happiness* at length found out, in what we falsely called hitherto *empty* and *vain*. May not this forfeit the Presence and Aids of that Spirit, whose Departure, if continued, would not only *impoverish* the Soul, but prove the *Death* of it? Conversing with this World as an *alluring City*, has a stupefying Quality in it; and altho' while we live as those who are looking for the Coming of the Great God our Saviour, our Souls will prosper, and this Earth be trodden under our Feet; yet we shall be poor Christians (slothful, heavy, sleepy Christians) if we are once wrought into an inexpectancy of the Coming of our Lord.

Now, is a Christian thus endanger'd, being thus circumstanc'd? And can it surprize us, that the *Hypocrite*, who may endure for a while, does at length wither away when he has no Root in him.

For the Application of this part of the Subject, let me say,

1. What we have heard teaches us, how unwarrantable that Judgment is, which we form of a Man's spiritual *Estate*, from some few remarkable Incidents in his *Life*. A Person may do many good *Actions*, who is not a good Man; another may be truly gracious

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who acts in *some* respects very *unlike* a Christian. We find that *slumbring and sleeping* did not forfeit the Character of *wise Virgins*, to those against whom the Charge was truly laid. This was an *accidental* Infirmity, whereas for the *general*, their *Lives were order'd according to God's Word*. Christ could look them through, and he discover'd *Fire* under the *Ashes*; *Grace* amidst so amazing *Corruptions*: and pronounces those to be *wise*, whom we should have stigmatized as *foolish Virgins*. But, remember that this Doctrine is abused, if it is made either a *Temptation* to Sin, or an *Encouragement* to our being more easy in it; whenever this is the Case with us, it makes it no hard matter to judge of our Condition God-ward: such a Temper being the Reverse to what he himself has told us is to be found in *his Children*.

2. Let us habituate ourselves to the Thoughts of *Christ's Coming*, as a Preservative against *slumbring Christianity*. However remote from our time the Conflagration of this visible Frame of Nature may be, and our Lord's coming to dispatch the Affair of the general Judgment, yet *this Night may your Soul or mine be required at our hands*; the Judge may be nigh us, even at the Door. In a moment we go down to the Grave; and it will be the End of the World to us, when we

are gather'd to our long home. Did we see that our Feet stood in such slippery Places, that in the midst of Life we are in Death, not at hand's breadth between us and the Grave, even while we are in our best Estate; what manner of Persons should we be, in all holy Conversation and Godliness? doing whatever our hand finds to do, with all our might? lest coming suddenly, he should find us sleeping.

The Propriety and Aptitude of this Means is obvious upon the slightest Reflection. Make Conscience of using it, as you would not,

(1.) Bring a Reproach upon the Redeemer's Name and Cause. Religion is wounded by the unwary and incircumspect Deportment of its Votaries, and if we have ingenuous Spirits, it will touch us to the quick to think that the good Ways of God are blasphemed upon our account. When a Christian's Love appears to be waxed cold, by his growing weary in well doing, when there are Spots in his Life, who should be blameless, harmless, and shine as a Light in the World, these things bring up an evil Report of the Master and Work he has chosen. Men who have never experienced its Power, will say that there is nothing in Religion, and that such tire of it, who have made the utmost Tryal; and when he comes to have Conscience thoroughly awaken'd, this will prove

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to the Christian as an *Iron* that enters into his *Soul*. Guard against this Inconvenience, by inuring the Mind to a daily looking for *Christ*.

(2.) Fall in with this Advice, as you would not perplex and embarrass your *Soul-Affairs*. By giving way to a Spirit of *Slumber*, you not only injure *Religion*, but greatly hurt yourselves. You cannot tell where this will stop; tho of this you may be certain, it will cost you very dear before you are restored whence you have fallen. You shall find it an evil thing and a bitter, that you looked cold upon God, or behaved in his Work as tho you were to serve him for nought. Now did any Man ever yet hate his own *Flesh*, and yet rather nourish and cherish it? If you would avoid his *Punishment*, keep yourselves clear of the *slumbering* Christian's *Guilt*; and if you would be innocent of this great *Transgression*, accustom yourselves to the *Thought*, live in the *Expectation* of *Christ's* coming.

Blessed is that *Servant*, whom when he comes he shall find in such a Posture. He will publicly applaud his *Vigilance* and *Fidelity*; make him *Ruler* over much, who was faithful over a little, adjudging him to enter into his *Master's Joy*. But if a pretended *Servant* of his shall say in his Heart, *My Lord delayeth his coming*; and presuming upon this, shall abandon himself to *Libertinism* and *Excess*,

52 *Christ's tarrying, &c.* Sermon II.

the Lord of that Servant shall come in a Day when he looked not for him, and in an Hour which he is not aware of, and shall cut him in sunder, appointing him his Portion with the Hypocrites, there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.



S E R.



SERMON III.

*When we Think not, the Lord
cometh.*



YOU have seen, that the Presence of *Sin* may consist with the Truth of *Grace*; that the wise *Virgins* have their *slumbring* Seasons as well as the *foolish*; and that the *Bridegroom's tarrying* is abused both by the one and t'other, as an Occasion of, and Temptation to this particular Sin.

These Heads comprehend all we aim'd at under the

IId Prop.

We go on to the

IId Prop. mention'd from these Words, which was this, *viz.* That Christ often comes to our particular Judgment, at the time wherein he was least looked for.

I gather this from what occurs in the 6th Verse of this Chapter, where the Words are these, *viz. At MIDNIGHT there was a Cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh ! go out to meet him.*

It is plain that our Lord pursues the Allusion to the *Jewish* Custom in their *Marriages*, of which I took notice when we first enter'd upon this Parable. The Bride elect continued in her Father's House, and made not the least *Advance* towards her Spouse ; this would have been reckon'd as indecent Forwardness, and a Forfeiture of the Woman's Modesty : but upon notice given of his Approach, the Virgins who were in waiting, went forth with their Lamps, to conduct him to the House, where she expected his Arrival. He came *early* in the Night, but we are told that in this case the usual time was pass'd, all Thoughts of his coming at an end ; they indulge in *slumber and sleep*, and at this very juncture are roused with the Cry, *Behold the Bridegroom cometh ! At Midnight*, when they had done watching and expecting, concluded that they might safely venture to *sleep on, and take their Rest ; in the Hour of which they thought not, he cometh.*

Some will have the *Coming of Christ*, which is here spoken of, to be his Appearance in the last Judgment. They make this *Midnight Cry* to be the Alarm that shall be given by

the Voice of an Archangel, and the Trump of God, for such as are in their Graves to come forth. Referring to that Description of the Apostle Paul, which he gives 1 *Thess.* iv. 16. admitting this Passage to be capable of such an Interpretation, yet it breaks not in upon our Lord's Design, to suppose that he points in these words at his coming in the Article of *Death*, to end our *Tryal State*, and enter us into the World of *Recompences and Rewards*. His coming to us at *Death*, is in a great measure equivalent to his coming at *Judgment*; for then are we happy or miserable, according to the different Qualities of our past Actions in Life, tho at *Judgment* our State is publickly and unchangeably fixed, and we shall experience an *Encrease* of Pleasure or Pain upon the Resurrection of the Body: so that nothing does forbid our attending to our Saviour's Words, as looking *this way* in the Purport and Intendment of them: I mean to his coming by *Death* to our particular *Judgment*.

That this particular *Judgment* is no farther off than the time of our *Death*, is sufficiently intimated, when the Scriptures mention our being *present with the Lord*, as what is immediately the Christian's Case upon his being *absent from the Body*; and add *his lifting up his Eyes in Hell*, as what immediately followed upon the wicked Man's *Death*. Compare 2 *Cor.* v. 8. with *Luke* xvi. 22, 23.

I shall therefore pursue *this* as the Subject contained in this part of the Parable, *viz.* That Christ often comes by *Death* to our *particular Judgment*, when we are least thoughtful of his coming.

In prosecuting which, we will attend to this Method :

First, Endeavour to *support* this Remark, by shewing you what Foundation it has in the *Scriptures*.

Secondly, Enquire whence it comes to pass, that Unthoughtfulness of *Death* is so general a Failing.

Thirdly, *Expose* the *Folly* of growing thoughtless and secure in this Instance.

We will then improve this part of the Subject in a *practical* way.

First, I am to *justify* this Remark, by shewing you what Foundation it has in the *Holy Scriptures*, *viz.* That Christ usually comes to call us to an account, when we least expected his coming. I do not say, that *all* are *surprized*, out of Time, into Eternity. *Paul* had learnt to *die daily*, 1 Cor. xv. 31. and many have actually attain'd what *Peter* recommended to the Christians of his day, *lived in all holy Conversation and Godliness, looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God*, 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12. We only say that it is common for Men to be
called

called to die, when they are pleasing themselves with the Prospect of a long Life. A few particular Exceptions endanger not the Truth of this general Observation.

How abundantly does our Lord himself support this, when he says, *As the Days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.* For as in the Days of Noah which were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in Marriage, until the Day that Noah entred into the Ark, and KNEW NOT until the Flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be: Mat. xxiv. 37, 38, 39. At the 43d Verse of the same Chapter he compares it to the Thief's coming in a Watch of the Night, in which the good Man of the House thought himself secure; of which he KNEW NOT. And (not to multiply Quotations) our Lord elsewhere asserts, that this Day shall come upon Men UNAWARES, and that as a SNARE it shall come on all them who dwell on the Face of the Earth; Luke xxi. 34, 35. The Bird would not be raken in the Snare, did she know it, and look for it; but is then entangled, when least apprehensive of Danger.

You will object (perhaps) that these Passages refer to the general Judgment, and so are not properly advanced in the present Case. As to this, let me say, that they will hold good when apply'd to Christ's coming.

coming to our *particular* Judgment, as well as when supposed to respect the last and *general* one; otherwise the Parable of the *foolish rich Man* in the Gospel is wrong, even as to the very *Scope* and *Design* of it. I shall repeat as much of that Parable, as is needful to our purpose. This, it seems, was the Resolution taken by that stupid Worldling, *I will say to my Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many YEARS, take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry; but God said to him, Thou Fool, this NIGHT thy Soul shall be required of thee; Luke xii. 19, 20. q. d. Thou art providing for Futurity, and because thine Estate may hold out for many Years Revels, art Fool enough to imagine that Death must be at a vast distance; but you may never be nearer dying, than when the Grave is made out of sight: This is thy Case, for you talk of living and rioting for YEARS to come, whereas this NIGHT you shall die.*

Certainly when we are commanded to *watch, and wait for his coming*, this can mean no other than Christ's coming by Death; and yet this is urged upon us frequently in Scripture from that Consideration, which amounts to all we assert, *viz. Christ's coming (in this way) at a Day and Hour we look not for: see Mat. xxiv. 42. Mark xiii. 35, 36, 37.* Why is this Doctrine carry'd thro the Gospel? the same Case stated over and over again, if this were not *Fact*? one of Im-

portant

importance to be set right about? tho a Truth which our Minds do not without *difficulty* fall under the Force and Influence of?

Secondly, Let us now enquire whence it comes to pass, that *Unthoughtfulness of Death* is so general a Failing; and the coming of Christ at a time in which we looked not for it. His coming can never be *unsafe* to a gracious Person, tho in some Circumstances it may be less agreeable than in others. *Habitual Preparation* they have, when born of God; and upon their believing, are included in that Covenant, which makes their Salvation absolutely safe. But he must be *actually* ready, who would sing of *Victory* in the last Conflict, and *rejoice upon his finding the Grave*. Among other things which make up this *actual Preparation*, a lively and affecting Prospect of *Christ's coming*, and a *patient waiting* for it, are no small Ingredients. We do not mean therefore, when we speak of Christ's surprizing us by Death, that this is ever done so as to put a regenerated Person's Well-being for Eternity into the least hazard; but when he comes, and not looked for, a good Man may want Hope in his Death, and a Sinner is in the way of being irrecoverably lost.

Now the Case being stated in this light, I proceed to shew you what account may be given of the *Reasons* of so general an

Infat-

Infatuation: That tho the *Living* know that they must die, yet it's so common both to good Men and bad, to indulge to a *Forgetfulness* of their great Change. And,

1st, There is a natural *Desire of Life*, that's a part of our Constitution in good Men and bad; this hinders us as to a serious, prevailing *Expectancy of Christ's coming*. Death consider'd as the *Dissolution* of the present Frame, as the *divorcing* two such Intimates as Soul and Body, as *leaving* what we see and have long pleasurably enjoy'd, to enter into an *unseen* eternal World, has somewhat in it ungrateful and shocking to Nature. Where that Faith is strong, which is the *Evidence of unseen things*, there may remain some sort of a *Dislike* of Death; and in proportion to the *Weakness* of this Faith, we shall feel still more of the Force of this *universal Law*. Our incarnate Redeemer was not without some seeming Abhorrency of Death, as an *Enemy to Nature*, tho his *Human Will* yields to the *Divine*, considering it as a *necessary Act of Obedience*, and essential to his Discharge of the Mediatorial Character. Now, we do not frequently, and of choice, converse with what has somewhat so disagreeable to us in it, considering us under the Power of this *universal Law of Nature*. Grace does regulate and improve, but it does not destroy Nature. By begetting us in the *Hopes* of a better Life, it contributes towards

wards the weaning us from *this*; but still, while we are in the Body, we shall experience this among other Inconveniences of an imbody'd Estate, *viz.* we shall find it hard to keep ourselves in a lively, chearful, constant *Expectation* of what is, and will be presented as a *severe Tryal* to Flesh and Blood.

We are in danger,

1. Of accounting these Thoughts *needless*, while in an establish'd and flourishing State of *Health*. No Man can be so abandon'd, as to conclude that he is *immortal*, because as yet he feels not the *Pangs* and *Agonies*, which are the Harbingers of *Death*; but the best are too prone to think that *Death* is at a *distance*, while they neither see nor feel any thing like the *Forerunners* of that last Enemy. While their Breasts are full of Milk, and their Bones of Marrow, they go forth to their Labour as Giants refreshed with Wine: so full an Enjoyment of Life, sets them above any Apprehensions of *Death*. At least, tho they may believe that they shall die, yet they conclude that there are many Stages between them, and the House appointed for all the Living. The Wise Man intimates the Force of this Temptation, that it works, and too often prevails this way, when he says in a Satyr upon such Indiscretion, Rejoice, O young Man, in thy Youth, let thine Heart cheer thee in the Days of thy Youth; walk in the Ways of thine Heart, and in the Sight

Sight of thine Eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment, Eccles. xi. 9. q. d. Tho you may allow that grey Hairs and the Grave should be well acquainted, that are in a constant Nearness to one another; yet you reckon that Youth and Judgment may be less intimate: as if there were such as a certain Length to be run, before you could meet the Grave. And who of us has not been more or less insnared by the same erroneous way of Thinking? in the Prime and Vigour of Life, thought it a sort of Impertinence to converse with a Winding-Sheet, and dwell among the Ruins of a Grave?

2. As the natural Desire for Life implanted in each of us, makes the Thought of Death appear improper in the Time of Health, so it makes it unpleasant on a Bed of Languishing. They who have learned to believe that our Life is but a Vapour, and that we are crush'd as easily as the Moth, will find it less difficult to bear in Fact, what they have often suffer'd in Speculation; deliberately, seriously, and of choice, done so. But a good Man, little used to this mental Conversation with the Grave, will be apt to look into it with Reluctancy, when brought more in view. Instead of Paul's Desire to depart, chuse pious David's Prayer, *O spare me, that I may recover Strength, before I go hence, and be no more; Psal. xxxix. 13.* We have

ny times seen this *Desire of Life* express itself, even where the *Hopes of Life* have been taken away; and the Christian brought, with extreme *Difficulty*, to entertain the *Sentence of Death* in himself.

Now, does not this account in some measure for Christ's coming, when we *least expected* it? In *Health* the Thought has appeared *improper*, in *Sickness* *unpleasant*; we are unwilling to believe what we wish to be untrue, and so may be tempted to build upon *Life*, till the *Arrow strikes us thro the Liver*.

2dly, There is something in the Texture of our Natures, which makes them capable of Impressions from what's *present* and *sensible*, to the prejudice of such an *Expectancy of Christ*, as is our Duty. They came not so out of the hands of God, he made them *upright*; but ever since we fell from him, there has been a *cleaving to the Creature*, which, like a sort of *Contagion*, has infected the whole human Race. Christ came into the World, as the Restorer of the Apostacy; and with a particular View to the bringing us back again, from the *Creature*, to *God*. Where his Grace has savingly apprehended any, this Design of his Incarnation is *in part* accomplished to them; the Stream of their Affections is alter'd, and they are renew'd in the Spirit of their Minds, but how many *Eccentric Motions*, to let them

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them know, that *what is perfect is not yet come?*

Whatever are their Circumstances in Life, they will shew, at some time or other, that they are not thoroughly cured of this deep and hereditary Illness. For,

(1.) The *Affluence* of this World's Good often betrays us into an *Unacquaintedness* with *Death* and the *Grave*. The rich Man did not say, *Soul take thine Ease*, indulge to Pleasure, discharge all Thoughts of Death, live merrily for Years to come, until he was a rich Man; his Abundance greatly increased, that he *knew not where to bestow his Goods*. The more delightful his Circumstances, the greater his Unwillingness to leave such a goodly Heritage; and so weak was he, as to reckon upon it, that because he could not be quickly brought to a liking of Death, he should not be suddenly disturbed by it. If a prosperous State were not attended with special Temptations, Christ would not have carry'd the point so far, as to pronounce it next to impossible for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, Mat. xix. 24. Nor had *Agur's* Wish discover'd so great Wisdom, when he prefers Food convenient to the most exuberant Fullness, Prov. xxx. 8. How many Fools, i. e. Sinners, has Prosperity destroy'd? It has furnish'd out such a Variety of Amusements to engage the Mind, that no Time or Place have been

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left for those Thoughts, that have been of the most important nature. They supposed that the *Mountain should never be moved*, which stood firm for the present; and while they have been building *Tabernacles* here, as in a *City that had Foundations*, have seen the *Hand-writing upon the Wall*; regardless of Death, till actually under his Arrest. And have not good Men shewn the Corruption of their Natures, when raised to those Heights where but few can maintain their standing? They have grown *indolent*, when their Situation easy: Settled on their *Lees*, when they had no Changes; and got the Spirit of the World, with its *Plenty*.

These things engage the Mind, they are good, they are present, we see them, taste them, handle them; and how often have they made things infinitely greater and better, abate as to their *Worth and Importance*, purely as *invisible, distant, and future*? I look upon this as one of the most dangerous Snares in a prosperous Circumstance, that it's apt to make us forget that we are *dying Creatures*; and as this Thought, while it commands the Mind, will invigorate our Obedience, it will be *lame and defective*, in proportion as our Minds cease to be under the Impression of this Thought. But,

(2.) *Crosses and Disappointments* in the World are improved by Satan and our own wicked Hearts, to keep us Strangers to *dy-*
ing

ing Work. Our Saviour tells us thus much when, *Luke xxi. 34.* he says, *Take heed of yourselves, lest at any time your Hearts be overcharged with Surfeiting, and Drunkenness, and the Cares of this Life, (unelusive, anxious, perplexing, distracting Cares) and so that they come upon you unawares.* It seems, by our Lord's Caution directed to his *Disciples*, that good Men are not out of danger of *Sensuality* in a soft and easy way of Life; or of excessive *Solicitude* about worldly things, when they are kept with a *streighter hand*. And 'tis obvious from this Passage, That intemperate Care about getting or keeping the World as much unfits us for *dying like Christians*, as an intemperate Enjoyment of it. There is *Thoughtfulness for the Morrow* that is encouraged by Religion, that *interferes* not with the Christian Character, no, it rather *beautifies* and *recommends* it; but to give a proper *Measure* of Heed and Attention to these things, to avoid the two criminal Extremes here's the grand Difficulty. Says a good Man, If God bless me to recover from my present Streights, and again brings my Feet into a plain Path, I hope I shall serve him with less *Distraction*; but at present, a Care about the World, which I cannot shake off, follows me whithersoever I go, and mingles itself with all the *Actions* of my Life. Satan works upon the Corruption of our Natures, by the present Posture of things

and does he not succeed, to the keeping the Mind in a continued Hurry about more useful and comfortable *Life*, till the Thought of *dying* is, by degrees, worn out of the Mind, as tho *Poverty* had made Men *immortal*?

You see, that the *Affluence* of this World charms the Mind into an Unthoughtfulness of Death; its *Streights* and *Difficulties* so busy it about a Supply, that it's as much in danger of forgetting the *one thing needful* this way. There is no Circumstance of Life which furnishes not Avocations from this Point, and does not help to betray us into Unmindfulness of *Christ's Coming*. And thus far (you know) we are wrought into an *Unfitness* for being *found of him in peace*.

Well, having proved that Christ usually comes when we least looked for his Coming, and given you some general Account whence it is that this happens to be so; I am now,

Thirdly, To expose the *Folly* of this Conduct, upon whomsoever it is chargeable.

This Point will be quickly issued, if you will admit the Particulars which follow. Such as,

1. Death is not less *certain*, or less *near*, by your *forgetting* that you are dying Creatures. Were it only a *possible* thing that you might die, it would shew Weakness to overlook an Event so very *momentous*, tho barely

barely possible. Allowing it to be *probable* the Folly is aggravated. But can it be less than downright *Madness*, to live thoughtless of Death, when it is *certain* that we must die? When there is an unalterable Statute of Heaven, by which this is *appointed* unto *all Men*? Heb. ix. 27. Were our Death fixed upon the Revolution of so many *Ages*, it would be less a Forfeiture of our Wisdom, tho' it abode not continually upon the *Imaginations of the Thoughts of our Hearts*. Were there so many *Preliminaries* to be settled before which it could not make the *Attack*, *Notice* of which was to be given in form, this would abate the *Indiscretion*, tho' we do sometimes discharge that painful Thought from our Minds; But may my *next Breath* be my *last*? Christ come without this *Pre-amble*? and strike me into the Grave, where I thought myself furthest from it? 'Tis Folly then that will admit no *Alleviation* if I live as if that would not reach me in a *Year*, that may overtake me in a *Month* and settle my Soul's State for *Eternity*. And

2. Tho' Death is neither less certain, nor near, by forgetting it, yet it may hereby be less *safe* and *comfortable*. All Repentance which is *sincere* and *heartly*, is *saving*; but we cannot say that all *late* Repentance is *sincere*. *The foolish Virgins* were for trimming their Lamps, when they heard that the *Bridegroom* was come; every poor Wretch

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for doing his best to get into some sort of *Readiness*, when he sees himself about to appear before God: but my Text tells us, that those unhappy Creatures, whom we find in such an *hurry* to set themselves off as Christ's *Friends*, were *shut out*, and publickly *disown'd* by him. To how plain a hazard do they put their eternal Safety, who leave the Work of making their Peace with God to a *Death-Bed*? i. e. put it off till they have nothing else to do? when many have scarce time to say *Lord save me*, between *Life* and *Death*? How *weak*, to lay a *Scheme*, and trust a *Soul*, and *Eternity* upon it, when the Odds are more than ten thousand to one, whether ever it will *bear*? To build our *Hopes* upon what is to be done when we come to *die*; whereas, besides that we know not whether we shall have the Exercise of *Reason* upon a sick Bed, and are much less assured of the *Spirit's* Assistance to work in us the *Repentance* and *Faith*, without which we cannot be *saved*: there could be nothing *new* in the Case, supposing that we perceived not that we were *in*, till in the Arms of *Death*. I observ'd more, that a Christian's *Safety* is not *in* danger'd, tho his Lord *should* come, when he *was* not for him; but how great the Difference between dying in *Safety*, and dying in *Triumph*? That good Man, who shall be in the *Firmament* of God for ever, may have

have died in a *Cloud*; not having known his own *Safety*, miss'd all the inward *Peace* and *Joy*, which should have fill'd his *Mind*, had he attain'd to a full *Assurance of Hope* in the *End*. And how wrong to rob ourselves of such choice *Cordials*, in such a *time of need*? How injurious to *Religion*, which it is our *Duty* to recommend both in *Life* and *Death*? At that time the dearest *Friends* will fail; ay, our *Heart and Flesh* will fail, and he only lays up a *Stock of living Comforts* against that *dying Time*, whose *Life* is a continued *Waiting until that Change should come*.

Let us briefly apply this part of the Subject.

1st, From the Scope of this Discourse 'tis natural to observe the *Degeneracy* of human Nature, in our being shy of conversing with *Death*, when so encouraged to form an *Acquaintance*. If dying, there remains nothing but a *fearful looking for Vengeance*, and *fiery Indignation*, and after we had discharged the *Tribute* we owe to *Death* natural, even as the *second Death* did receive *Power*; this being now but the *Beginning of Sorrows*, no wonder if *Horror* seized us upon the Prospect of the *Grave*. But can we remember that *Life and Immortality* are brought to Light, that *Christ* has *destroy'd him who had the Power of Death*, to release from their *Bondage* such

tho *Fear of Death* were subject to it? Can we see the last *Enemy* disarm'd, the Grave sanctify'd as a Place of *Rest* to our weary *Bones*, and our dying but our passing from the *Wilderness* into the promised *Land*? How unjustifiable now our *Aversion* to the Thoughts of dying? In this amiable *Light* the Scriptures set off the Christian's *Circumstances*; what a Mixture of *Folly* and *Madness* in this affected *Strangeness*? We should esteem that to be the *Day of the Gladness of our Hearts*, which is the *Day of Redemption* from a *Body of Sin and Death*; we should expect the Approach of that season, in which we shall be able to say, my Soul, the *Enemies* thou seest to-day, thou shalt see no more for ever. When *Sanctification* shall be compleated, all the annoying *Impulses* and *Consequences* of *Sin* be no more; the time of your *Death*, Christian, is this happy Period: is it not a *Reproach* to your Character then, that your Lord should come and you looked not for him? What, is Earth so dear, and natural Life, that the Thought of leaving them is grievous, when this shall be no more? How little Agreement between such a *Spirit* as this, and the *Name* that is named upon you?

Truly, You see the true Reason why Religion is so little recommended by the *Death* of those who profess it. It is not peculiar to the *Children of this World* to avoid Familiarity with

with the Grave; this Weakness they have in common with *the Children of Light*. 'Tis pity, that when Religion has provided for turning *the Serpent into a Rod*, and the *Shadow of Death into the Morning*, its Votaries should still remain liable to this Infirmary; yet it's but too certain, that in this *Article* we see little to distinguish the pious from the vile. How few declare plain to the World in their daily Walk, *That they are looking for another, a better, even an heavenly Country?* That they judge themselves to be but *Pilgrims and Strangers on Earth*, *were all their Fathers?* How few to whom the Reverse is not applicable, instead of keeping this in remembrance, that they were shortly to put off those *Tabernacles*. Now, can it be expected that they should finish their Course with Joy, and in their Acts exemplify the *Gain of Godliness*, who Death rather breaks in upon unawares, than meets after a long and regular Expectation of its coming? Here is the Reason why the Name and Cause of God have not more Honour reflected upon them by *the Death of his Saints*, viz. the Grave is out of sight, dying Work forgotten, and in an *Hour* they looked not for it, *their Lord comes*.

3dly, As you walk every day, *Christians* upon the Brink of Eternity, live in a daily Expectation of Death. This is the best way to enjoy Life while it lasts, and

advantageously to meet Death whenever it comes. Endeavour to get above all anxious Desires of Life, and slavish Fears of Death; and nothing can harm you, if you are thus the Followers of that which is good. By your moderation to all things under the Sun, shew that you believe *the Lord is at hand*. Besides the Influence which this will have upon the Innocence and Fruitfulness of Life, you may then say, with your dying Breath, I know that if this House of my Tabernacle that's earthly were dissolv'd; I have a Building of God, an House not made with Hands eternal in the Heavens; that when this shall fall, I shall be received into everlasting Habitations. Happy the Person who is in such a Case: Mark the perfect Man, behold the up-
right, the End of that Man is Peace. May that God who has directed our Hearts into Fear, direct us thro' the whole of Life, in such a patient looking for Christ.





SERMON IV.

*As Death leaves us, Judgment
finds us.*



WE have consider'd *Unthoughtfulness of Death*, as a general Faulting. No Character exempt from this Guilt, for 'tis charg'd upon both *wise and foolish Wretches*. Have examined into the *Grounds and Reasons* of the Case; shewing you the *Weakness and Folly* of indulging a *Forgetfulness* of this nature.

We come now to treat of the
IVth Prop. That it will fare with us
Eternity, according to the State and Con-
dition Christ finds us in *at his coming*. The
offers itself from those Parts of the Parable
where it's observ'd that such as were *re-
tred in to the Marriage*; and such whom

com

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coming found *unprepar'd* to meet him, were cast out for ever.

The wise Man says, if the Tree fall toward the South or toward the North, in the place where the Tree falleth, there it shall be; Eccl. xi. 3. The Remark will hold, as to our falling by the stroke of Death. If we be in the Lord, we shall be for ever with him: if Children of Wrath, this Wrath shall abide upon us for ever. We are not properly in a State of Trial while upon Earth, if being discharg'd from the Body, a Christian had yet more to do or bear as a necessary preparative for Glory; or a Sinner put under a fresh Dispensation of the Grace of God. The Doctrine of Purgatory is a sinful Artifice, but the Cheat would never have taken, had not Men been first taught that Ignorance of the Bible was a virtue; and that he had the most Christian spirit, who presum'd not to examine any Article that carry'd the Impression of the infallible Church. It offers manifest Violence to this divine Revelation, and sinks the Credit of our Redeemer's mediatory Service: but while those mercenary Men get Money by her Shrines, they will keep up the Cry, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians!* These Scriptures tells us, that there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave, whither we go; Eccl. ix. 10. *at when the Dust returns to its Dust as it*

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was, the Spirit shall return to God who gave it, Eccl. xii. 7. The Soul of the penitent Thief was receiv'd to Paradise, the same day of its disunion from his crucify'd Body; and we are taught to believe, that there is no intermediate Space between a wicked Man's dying, and his lifting up his Eyes in Hell-Torments. So that altho' Death does introduce all upon whom it passes into very different Circumstances of Happiness or Misery, to what they were in before, yet this is always agreeable to the State it finds them in: of which, when the Death has brought forth, and the Sentence is executed, there is no more Possibility of Change.

We laid this down as a Principle, that many things in a Parable are intended only to add to its Beauty, and that it is sufficient in our Interpretations, to attend its Sense; but the Remark now made, enters into the very Substance and Design of this Allegory. For if this Part be look'd upon as mere Flourish, it will be hard to prove that the Parable is instituted with any View to our Instruction.

In this Discourse we may enquire,

First, Into the Account our Lord gives of their Happiness, whom he shall find at his coming. It's said that they went with him to the Marriage, and the Door was shut.

Secondly

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Secondly, Wherein this Readiness consists. This Readiness to meet Christ at Death, and enter upon the Possession of this Happiness.

Thirdly, I'll shew you how warrantably we may look for this Happiness, when thus dispos'd and prepar'd for the Enjoyment of it.

The Way will then be clear'd to a practical Application of this Part of the Subject.

First, We are to see what this Happiness contains in it, which our Lord appropriates to such whom his coming shall find ready. He says, they that are ready go with him to the Marriage, and the Door is shut. And now, who would not die the Death of the Righteous, and have their latter End like his? How bright the Scene which opens to our View? How delightful! How full of Glory! In the Article of Conversion, there is a kind of Marriage-Covenant commences between God and the Soul. He mentions, with pleasure, the Kindness of their Youth, and Love of their Espousals; Jer. ii. 2. And to shew that the Choice is reciprocal, leaves this on record as what is done on his part, *I will BETHROTH thee unto me for ever; yea, I will BETHROTH thee un-*

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to me in Righteousness, and in Judgment, and in Loving-Kindness, and in Mercies. I will even BETROTH thee unto me in Faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord. Know that thy Redeemer is thy Husband: the Lord of Hosts is his Name, Hos. ii. 19, 20. We frequently find God setting himself forth in the Scriptures, as standing in this Relation to his People. Accordingly the Apostle Paul addresses the believing *Corinthians* in this Strain: *I have espoused you to one HUSBAND, that I may present you as a chaste Virgin to Christ*; 2 Cor. xi. 2. The solemnizing the Marriage Rites (you see) is reserv'd to our arrival at a better World. And *John* tells us, that a *Voice from the excellent Glory*, assured him of its Consummation, upon our getting safe to Heaven: his Words are these; *I heard, as it were, the Voice of a great Multitude, saying, Hallelujah: let us be glad and rejoice, and give Honour to God, for the MARRIAGE of the Lamb is come, and his Wife has made herself ready. Blessed are they who are called to the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb*. Rev. xix. 6, 7, 9. Our Lord chuses to represent in my Text, the Blessedness of the Righteous after death, in this attractive Light.

The Account he gives of this Matter contains in it the Particulars that follow, viz. The Magnificence that shall attend their Entertainment in Heaven. The pure

and perfect Joys, which they shall there possess: And the *immortal* Nature of their Felicity, which is not only *full* beyond measure, but *durable* without end. The two first are included in the Notion of their going with him to the *Marriage*: the last is pointed at, when we are told that the *Door* was shut.

1st, The Happiness of the Saints in Heaven, is represented as most *splendid* and *magnificent*, when set forth under the allusion of their going in to the *Marriage*. When ever the Scriptures introduce the mention of *the City of our God*, they speak *glorious things of her*, Ps. lxxxvii. 3. How *vastly pompous* the Portraiture given by St. John, when he says, *the City is of pure Gold, like to clear Glass; the building of the Wall of Jasper, its Foundation garnish'd with all manner of precious Stones, the twelve Gates, twelve Pearls? The Street of the City pure Gold, as it were, transparent Glass?* Rev. xxi. from the 18th. These rhetorical Flights are design'd to beget in the Mind, the most *lofty* Conceptions of the Blessedness of the Church of the *first born, whose Names are written in Heaven*. Accordingly, in proportion to the Grandure of the Place, its *Entertainments* are describ'd as *splendid* to a degree. What else can be aim'd at, when their Felicity above is decipher'd, by an *exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory?* their *sitting upon*
D 4 *Thrones?*

So *A Christian dies in the Lord*, Ser. IV.
Thrones? their receiving an *incorruptible*
Crown, and a *Kingdom which cannot be moved?*
their being *Kings and Priests unto God* for
ever? You see that their *Happiness* is set
off by *Images*, taken from those *Things*
which, among *Men*, are most apt to im-
press the *Mind* with a pleasing *Wonder*.
The *Things* which we conceive to be
the *Quintessence* and *Perfection* of worldly
Glory. And must it not be to fence us
against any *low Thoughts* of this *After-*
state, that it's said, *Eye hath not seen* any
thing that comes up to it? That it can-
not be parallel'd by any thing that *Ear*
has heard? That *Thought* itself cannot
reach the *Majesty* of the *Subject?* For it
has not entred into the Heart of Man to con-
ceive, what *God has laid up for such as love*
him.

And how properly is the *Allusion* in
my *Text* made use of, for answering the
same *Design?* At a *Marriage-Solemnity*
all things are extraordinary *grand*; when
it's a *King*, who enters into this new *Re-*
lation, what *Splendor*, and *Magnificence*, at-
tend the *Nuptials?* And since, in *Heaven*,
our *Maker* becomes our *Husband*, and the
Glorification of the *Just* is called a going
in with him to the MARRIAGE: we do not
take the *Idea* that's design'd to be convey'd
to us by this *Figure*, till we conceive

some-

Ser. IV. *and is ever with him.* 81

somewhat *August, Pompous, Majestick*, in the Blessedness of the Saints above.

2dly, Entering with him into the *Marriage*, instructs us further, of the unutterable Joy that shall be upon our Heads, when our Warfare is accomplish'd, Isa. xxxv. 10. The Scriptures delight to speak of Heaven, under this Notion of it. Thus the Psalmist, *There is a River, the Streams whereof shall make glad the City of God, the holy Place of the Tabernacle of the most High*; Psal. xvi. 4. and Psal. xvi. 11. *In thy presence is Fullness of Joy, at thy right Hand are PLEASURES for evermore.* The same thing is referr'd to, when we are told, that in Heaven all Tears shall be wiped from our Eyes, that sighing and sorrowing shall flee away, and our Work there be one continued Thank-offering.

Upon the Occasion of a *Marriage*, Sads of every sort gives way to a general Joy: 'tis a kind of Profanation of the sacred Rites, when they are attended with an uncheerful Aspect, especially if this should be the Case upon the Marriage of a King. Is not all this taken into our Saviour's Reply, to the captious Pharisees? *Can the Children of the Bride-chamber mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* It appears from hence, that when our Lord re-

D 5 presents

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presents our going to Heaven, by our going to the *Marriage*; he would have us to conceive of it, as an *entring into our Master's Joy* into a Place where there is neither a weeping Eye, nor a ruffled Breast; but every Soul as full of pure and satisfying Pleasure as it can bear.

No Wonder that this is the Case with the Saints above, if we remember such Things as these.

(1.) There is the *Absence* of whatever may unhinge the *Peace* of our Minds. Sin is the unhappy Cause of what makes our Tranquillity, while on Earth, so shattered and inconstant. It has introduced all the Evils which assault us from without, as well as the Disorder and Confusion in the Faculties of the Soul, which give those Evils the Sting; but we put off the Body of Sin, together with Mortality, and become like the Angels, in respect of *Purity*, upon our getting into the Seat of perfected Spirits. The Cause ceasing, the Effect does necessarily cease: We know none of the melancholy Fruits of Sin, when we commence saints. Now, how plainly does this further enlarge our Joy, to have the very Temper of our Minds molded into the divine Likeness, all our Faculties thoroughly sanctified? Every Passion, Affection, Appetite in the primitive Beauty? The eternal Absence of Sin, being a kind of additional Security

to us, that they shall continue in the same comely Order for ever; and so an Invasion upon this *Peace*, be for ever impossible.

(2.) In Heaven we shall enjoy whatever is *felicitating*. The Apostle speaking of our Privileges *at present*, tells us we are *Hirs of God*; *hereafter*, we shall be in possession of this incomprehensible Good. God himself will be our *Portion*. Now, must not *their Peace be as a River*, and their Joy as a *Flood*; who being prepar'd, by Grace, to relish such an happiness, do *see his Face*? taste his Love? enjoy intimate and uninterrupted Communion with him, whose Presence makes Heaven to be a Place of Rest and Bliss to all who people that glorious World? If the indistinct and short-liv'd Visions of him, vouchsafed in this State of Darkness, Distance, Minority, where our Sanctification is imperfect, have put more Joy into the Heart, than *the Increase of Corn and Wine*; sure their Joy must be *unspeakable*, when it is *full of Glory*: When they no longer *see darkly, and thro' a Glass*, but *face to face*. Such Revelations of himself having an *assimilating*, must also have a *Soul-quickening* Virtue.

Once more,

(3.) The blessed God does, in an immediate way, influence the Happiness of glorify'd Spirits; no wonder that in Heaven

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ven their Joy is full. The Pleasure must be great, which flows in upon the Mind, when the Soul reflects upon its own *Perfection*, and sees itself possess'd of such a goodly *Heritage*. Very powerful the Incentives to its Peace, and Joy, both from within and from without; but what can be wanting to render these complete, when the God of Peace says, *My Peace I give unto you*, whose almighty Word executes itself? What forbids our believing that he has this direct and positive Influence upon the Joy which abounds in Heaven, since all whom he makes meet for it, and translates thither, he does both for, with an Eye to their being happy, as he himself can make them?

Well, we say that our Lord intimates there being somewhat *grand* in their Circumstances, somewhat incomparably *delightful* and *joyous*, when he describes a Christian's getting to Heaven by his going in to the *Marriage*.

We observ'd in this Account,
3dly, That our Lord asserts the Blessedness of the Saints in Heaven to be of an *immortal* Nature. 'Tis *durable* as it's joyful, and *lasting* as it's full. When they enter with him into their *Father's House*, the Door is shut; that they may never be out of his Sight, or from under the Manifestations of his special Love. *Abraham* is introduced as saying to the wicked rich Man in Hell, *Between*

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and you there is a great Gulph fixed, to cut off all Communication. They that are here, cannot pass to you; neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence: Luke xvi. 26. q. d. Poor wretched Creature, the Door is shut, that all who come hither might be for ever safe, and all who are with you excluded for ever. 'Tis worthy of himself for God to give his People eternal Life, thro Jesus Christ our Lord. 'Tis this makes it an exceeding, its being an eternal Weight of Glory, Rom. vi. 23. 2 Cor. iv. 17. In Heaven all wear unfading Crowns; possess an Inheritance that's incorruptible. Their City has Foundations; their Treasure is durable Riches, and an abiding Substance. No fear of a Divorce, when we are married to the Lamb: He has betrothed us to himself for ever. When he fulfils that Covenant in Heaven, 'tis with a Design that nothing should violate or make it void throughout an endless Eternity.

This shall suffice for the

First Head; under which we were to enquire into the Account our Lord gives of their Happiness, whom he shall find ready at his coming, when it is said that they went with him to the Marriage, and the Door was shut.

Secondly, Let us now examine wherein this Readiness to meet with Christ at Death does consist. For it is observed of those, and
only

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only those who were ready, that they entered with him.

1st, There is an *habitual* Readiness to meet with Christ; and to this every real Christian has attain'd. This stands in our being in a *converted* and *reconciled* State; *turned from Darkness to Light, and from Satan's Power to God.* And nothing less than this *Regeneration* is sound *Christianity*. Faith discharges us from the Curse and Condemnation of the *first*, and interests us in the Grace of the *new, and better Covenant*. Nay, we become *the Children of God, thro Faith in Christ Jesus*. When he has wrought this good thing in us, we may be said to have the *Root of the Matter*. We cannot totally and finally fall away. We are safe in point of eternal *Salvation*, and in such a Sense *ready*, as agrees not to any in a natural Estate.

But beside this, there is also,

2^{dly}, An *actual* Preparedness for the coming of our Lord. This is every Christian's *Duty*, and 'tis a commendable Ambition to be incessantly pressing after it. Without this, we may die *safely, die in the Lord*, but we cannot die *joyfully*. Tho it's not absolutely necessary to our reaching Heaven, yet it is to our having an *abundant Entrance administered to us*.

There are at least these three things required, to make up the *actual* Preparation for Death, of which we speak.

1. A regular *Indifferency* and *Mortification* to the present World. Christ observed to us, that a being *overcharged with the Cares of this Life*, is what may happen to one who has the Grace of God; and yet it effectually disqualifies those to whom it may be apply'd, for a *comfortable* meeting with him. See the foremention'd *Luke xxi. 34.* This excessive *Anxiety* about temporal things arises from an inordinate *Love* of, and *Desire* after them; so that he must escape this Snare, who treats the World with Jealousy and Caution, and knows how to *use, without abusing it.* Paul was come a great length, when *Christ's Cross* had crucify'd him to the World, and the World to him. This helped to that Resolution and Firmness of Mind, with which he spoke of his being *ready to be offer'd up.* Made *Absence from the Body* more eligible than *abiding in the Flesh*; and inspir'd him with a *Desire to depart, and to be with Christ*, as what was *best of all.* The larger the share which this World, and the things of it, have in our Hearts, the less *Entertainment* shall we experience upon the Subject of *dying*; and that Man will find it very hard Work to die, who has lived an utter Stranger even to the Thoughts of it. He that would be *ready to meet Death* at the first Summons, must use himself to think of what it *is, and does.* By *dying daily*, we learn to die well.

2. There

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2. There is supposed in order to this *Readiness* to meet Christ, that *our Affections are set upon things above, and our Conversations in Heaven.* We must have Grace, which is not only *genuine* as to its *Kind*, but *improved and advanced* as to its *Measure and Degree*, not to *look at what is seen, and temporal, but unseen, and eternal things.* There are undoubtedly some such, whose *Hearts and Thoughts* center where their *Treasure is laid up.* And as nothing will make this Earth more contemptible, than our living in the upper glorious World; so nothing will make *Converses with Death* less unpleasant, or more refreshing. Temptations come with great *Disadvantage*, to one who thus lives with God. The Prospect of Death is delightful, as it finishes a sinning and sorrowing Condition, and is the Dawn of an everlasting Day of Rest and Blessedness.

To this *actual Preparation* for Dying, is required,

3. A daily Expectation of our Lord's Approach. The Apostle *Peter* makes this a sort of Abridgment of the Christian's Life, that it's *a looking for, and hastening unto Christ's coming*; 2 Pet. iii. 12. He who would then be found unto Praise, must keep his *Lamp trimmed, his Loins girt, governing himself in his general Walk* under the Force of this Thought, *At an Hour which I know not, my Lord will come.* Some sudden Fits of Seriousness,

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riousness, now and then to think of dying, and attempt to reconcile ourselves to it; this is not the *actual Readiness* of which we speak. In order to this, Progress in Sanctification must be our daily Study and Endeavour; and it must appear thro our *whole Lives*, that we are waiting for an Event that may surprize *e'er we are aware*. And how very happy his Circumstances, whom this Day shall overtake in such an Employment? What Anticipations of celestial Bliss will his Soul taste, before it has set foot upon *Emanuel's Land*?

But we shall have occasion to enter further into those things, when speaking to the *Vth Proposition*. These general Suggestions may serve for the present.

We come now to the

Third Head proposed to be spoken to. To shew you how warrantably we look for the Happiness of which our Lord speaks, when we are thus prepared for the Enjoyment of it. Expect, that if *ready* at his coming, we shall go with him into the *Marriage*.

It might be said,

1. That things cannot take another turn, but the *Righteousness* of God will fail. When the great Apostle *Paul* had said, *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith*, he adds, *Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness.*

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ness. And he argues his Security as to the
Event, from the Consideration of the *Righteousness*
of God: *The Lord, the righteous*
Judge, will give it me, says he; *q. d.* because
God is *righteous*, I am *safe*. And you may
observe, that he disclaims this as a *personal*
Privilege, that was confined to the Aposto-
lical Character; assuring *all* who had imi-
tated him in his Duty as a Christian, that
God allowed them to urge the same Plea.
The righteous Judge will give it, not to me only,
but to all them also who love his appearing;
2 Tim. iv. 8, 9. *q. d.* Tho I may reckon my
self among the *chief of Sinners*, yet have I ob-
tained Mercy; the Blessing I expect, tho ex-
ceedingly abundant above what I can think, was
purchased at the Expence of my Saviour's
Blood, for penitent, returning, believing
Sinners, such as by a *patient Continuance* in
well-doing look for it: of this number am I
by the rich and free Grace of God, and it
consists not with the *Righteousness* of the
Divine Nature, to withhold the Blessing so
dearly bought by their Surety, from those
whom his own Almighty Grace has formed
and fashion'd into a Meetness for the En-
joyment of it. I know that *there can be no*
Unrighteousness with God; and since Justice in
his Son, requires his being *gracious to the*
Seed, I am sure of Glory, as if *sat down*
ready in the heavenly Places. Again,

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2. The *Faithfulness* of God is a super-added Encouragement to us, when we are looking for *eternal Life* as his *Gift*. We cannot suppose that he made known so many *great and precious Promises*, as run thro the Revelation he has given us, with a View to the disappointing the Hopes raised by them in the Minds of his People. *He is not Man, that he should lye, nor the Son of Man, that he should repent. He abideth faithful; and tho the Heavens and Earth should pass away, one tittle that he has said shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.* The Apostle Paul concludes the Christian's Safety from this very Perfection of God's Nature: *Let us (says he) hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, and continue to draw near to God with a true Heart, and in full Assurance of Faith; for he is faithful that promised.* That promised what? That promised we should e'er long reap, if we fainted not; and if we endured to the end, should be saved: Heb. x. 22, 23. *q. d.* If we should miscarry at last, then God would be *unfaithful* to his Word; but since such a Weakness is impossible to him, we should cherish a *lively Hope*, and rejoice in the Prospect of the approaching *Glory* of God.

3. The sanctifying Work of the Spirit upon the Soul, does further warrant us in these Expectations. He is called by the Apostle, *The Earnest of the Inheritance until the*

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the Redemption of the purchased Possession, 2 Cor.
v. 5. Eph. i. 14. Lest we should think
God's *Word* too slender a Security, he puts
as it were a *Pledge* into our hands. When
he sends the *Spirit of his Son into the Hearts*
of his Children, he says to them, Here is a
Pawn I lodge with you, that you may have
no Doubts as to my fulfilling the Covenant
which is between us; take this Spirit as an
Earnest of what is behind. Every wise
Man works with a View to a certain End,
but did God fit a Soul for Heaven, and af-
terward deny it Admission there, this would
be to act without an *End*; or in a very so-
lemn manner to beget and carry on Hopes,
which he knew would *make us ashamed*.

In short, *Christ has died in vain*, in vain
is the Mission, and various Influences of the
Spirit, if Sanctification and Glorification
have not an inviolable and necessary Depen-
dence on each other. The whole Gospel
is a meer *Fiction*, if such as are ready for
Christ's coming, go not with him in to the
Marriage.

What is the Issue of Things with an un-
prepared Person, I shall consider in the next
Discourse, from that part of the Parable
which tells us, that the *foolish Virgins* were
shut out, and knocked without having Ad-
mission for ever. They go into everlasting Pe-
nishment, but the *Righteous into Life eternal*.

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Let us *apply* what has been now said.

1st, We may learn from hence, that it is active, painful, fruitful, persevering Christianity, and that only, which shall be followed with the *Gift of Eternal Life*. 'Tis not enough that we set out *in the Spirit*, and for a Season *run well*. We must lead the whole of that *Life, which we live in the Flesh, by the Faith of the Son of God*, if we would *run, as at length to receive the Prize*. Amidst the Crowd of such who pass for his Disciples, how few have *thus learned Christ*? How very many that *conform to this World*, instead of being *transform'd into the Spirit of the Religion which they profess*? Their Conversation is as earthly and sensual, as if they had never *set their Faces Heavenwards*. O with what Confusion will Christ's Coming fill such inconstant, careless, temporizing Christians, whose Goodness has proved like the *Morning Cloud and early Dew, which pass away*? And may not their Joy be as the Joy of Harvest, who have been enabled to abide with him in all his Temptations, thro good Report and ill Report, following the Lamb, and to their Death not removing from them their Integrity? The Time of their Death will be a Time of Refreshment from the Presence of the Lord. The very Glimmers of that inaccessible Light, which is breaking in upon them, will scatter the Darkeness of the Grave, and both guide and comfort them when they are
to

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to pass thro it ; they shall have *everlasting Arms underneath them*, and a glorious Escape out of all their Trials : for verily there is a *Rest that remains for the People of God*.

2dly, Let us improve the Joy set before us, as a Motive to greater *Fervency in Spirit*, when we are serving the Lord. 'Tis a shame, Christian, not to run with full Consent the way of God's Commandments, when so truly noble is the Prize of your high Calling in Christ Jesus. 'Tis undervaluing your Father's Love, your Saviour's Purchase, and writing *Ikabod* upon the Entertainment and Felicity of the Angels of Light. Pray for the Increase of that Faith, which is the Evidence of Things not seen ; keep a fixed Eye upon the *Recompence of Reward* ; this will stablish and strengthen you, that you will not grow weary or faint in your Mind ; it will make Life easy and useful, and prevent any hurtful Surprizes by Death : Thus shall ye grow white to the Harvest ; and tho you went forth weeping, bearing your precious Seed, ye shall doubtless return rejoicing, bringing your Sheaves with you.

For setting this home upon Conscience, it might be said,

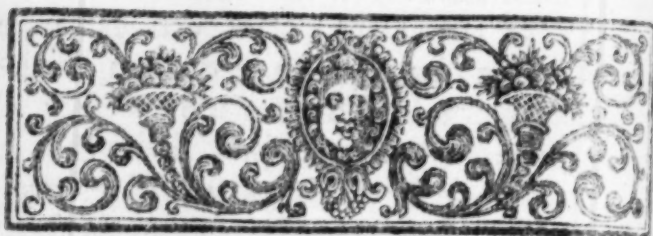
(1.) That God expected it should inspire our Obedience, when he drew aside the Veil, and disclosed the Glories of the better World. His Authority, as our Sovereign, makes his Will our Duty ; and without any of the *Encouragements* he has given us,

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as, it would have been criminal to trifle in the Work of the Lord. But did he give such matter for our *Hopes* to feed upon, without an answerable Expectation of *Fruit*? when he takes us up to *Pisgah*, and thence furnishes a Prospect of the *Land of Promise*, it is to inflame our Desires, give us fresh Life and Vigour in Duty, that we might mend our Pace, and take strait Steps to the World of Vision. While Heaven has not this Influence upon you, Christian, you answer not the Design of God, in bringing it to light.

(2.) If you are not thus animated by the Views of Heaven, you will experience but little of the Christian's *Peace*, either in Life or Death; the more eminent our *Obedience*, the more abundant in proportion our *Joy*: And shall we willingly obstruct the Growth and Increase of that Peace, which *the World cannot move, nor take away* from us? Think oftner of Heaven, and you will love it; remember it as the Residence of *God, the Judge of all, and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*; as the Place of your *Birth*, and of your *Rest*. You will find enough in these Thoughts to make you patient in *suffering*, and cheartful in *doing the Will of God*; and so to fit you for that blessed eternal World.

S E R-



SERMON V.

The Unready at Death, lost for ever.



DEATH fixes our Condition for Eternity ; *there is no Work in the Grave* : Such as are ready at his Coming, Christ takes with him *to the Marriage*. Their After-State is *grand and joyous*, and commensurate, in its *Duration*, to the *Immortality* of those Spirits, that can never die. When received up into *Glory*, the *Door is shut*, to intimate their *Safety* in these Circumstances, and the *Impossibility* of their losing their present *Happiness* for ever. Beside, an *habitual Readiness*, which consists in our being *ready again*, and is strictly necessary to our dying in *Safety* ; there is such a thing as *actual Preparation* attainable, and 'tis this that makes our *latter End Peace*. All whom his Grace has made ready for his Coming, have Heaven secured

secured to them, by the *Righteousness* of God, his *Faithfulness*, they have a *Pledge* and *Earnest* of this given them, in the renewing and sanctifying Presence of the Holy Ghost.

But when we say that it is to fare with us to Eternity, according to the State and Condition Christ finds us in at his Coming, this is not to be restrained to the *Christian*.

In the following Discourse we'll consider this Remark as it respects a *wicked* Person, whom Christ's Coming by Death shall find altogether *unprepared*; an Hypocrite, who had a *Lamp*, but *no Oil in his Vessel*. Our Lord tells us what the Issue of Things will be with the *foolish Virgins*, as well as the wise; when the *Bridegroom* came (says he) such as were ready went in with him to the Marriage; the rest were *shut out*: and all the Return they meet with upon their importunate Applications for Entrance, is this, *Depart from me, I know you not.* q. d. You have been Traitors under a colour of Friendship; and *being filthy, be ye filthy still*.

In pursuing this Observation, we'll speak to the following Heads:

First, Prove the Remark to be just and sensible, when we say, That such, whom Christ's Coming by Death shall find *unprepared*, shall be dealt with accordingly in the next World.

E

Secondly,

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Secondly, Enquire into the Account which our Lord gives us of their After-State, when he tells us, that *the Door is shut against them*, and professes, upon their entreating Mercy, *I know you not.*

Thirdly, Shew, that it is every way consistent with the Perfection of the Divine Nature, that Matters should go on in this Order. We'll then see,

Fourthly, How this part of the Subject may be most profitably *apply'd*, in reference to *Practice.*

First, We're to prove that this Observation is just, *viz.* That all such, whom the Coming of Christ by Death shall find *unready*, shall have their everlasting Condition *issued accordingly.* The *Unreadiness* of which we now speak, is not merely the want of an *actual* Preparation for Death, as that is opposed to an *habitual* Preparation; but the entire Unfitness both as to *Habit* and *Ability*, which is every Man's Case in an unregenerate State. Such as are unarmed against the *Sting of Death*, which is the undischarged Guilt of *Sin*, and remain under the penal *Law* or *Curse*, which is *Sins* condemning *Strength*, are in all respects unprovided for Christ's Coming, 1 Cor. xv. 56. If Death arrest us in a *natural* State, it finds us under all the Ruins of the Apostacy; and upon the foot of the first and broken Covenant

and dying in our Sins, we shall be treated for ever as Hypocrites and Unbelievers. Repentance is not a Grace in the next World, but a Punishment. When Christ says, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*; in limiting the Promise to the Repentance that is exercis'd in our Tryal-State, he assures us, that hereafter it shall find no room, tho' sought bitterly, and with Tears; Mat. v. 4. compar'd with Heb. xii. 17. Repentance after Death, is an Ingredient in our Misery, not a Qualification for Pardon and Acceptance.

Observe, we do not say but that late Repentance may be saving, tho' 'tis difficult to know whether it is genuine and sincere, when thus late; but we say that such, as under a Profession of Religion, die in a State of Infidelity, Death will make no Alteration in their Souls State, as guilty undone Creatures: but as they finish their Tryal-State, it shall fare with them in the World of Retributions. I hinted before, that the Doctrine of Purgatory was a novel Invention, the Reverse to the Doctrine of the Bible; an Insult upon the Redeemer's mediatorial Character: and that if good Men had more, either to do or bear, previous to their Investiture in the Happiness of Heaven, upon their being discharg'd from this World and Body; or if Hypocrites, when this Life ended, were put under a new

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Dispensation of the Grace of God, the Scriptures would mislead us, in representing the present as the only State of Tryal. It shall suffice, that I shew you what Foundation our general Remark has in the Scriptures; for I aim at their Conviction only, who will be determin'd by this Authority.

I take this to be referr'd to, in the Message which the Prophet *Isaiah* tells us he had in Commission from the Lord of Hosts, to deliver. His Words are these, *Say to the Righteous, it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the Fruit of their Doings. Woe to the Wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the Reward of his Hands shall be given him; Isa. iii. 10, 11.* In this World, where all things fall out alike to all, the good Man attains not to the Happiness, nor is the wicked Man overtaken by the full Woe intended him. We must suppose the Prophet to have look'd beyond this Life and World, and his Sense to be much like what those Words of the Apostle intimate, when he says, *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for what a Man sows, it is that he shall also reap: he that soweth to his Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting: Gal. vi. 7, 8.* There is another Passage in the Writings of this Apostle, which says as much as we can desire, upon this Head: *We must all appear before the Judgment-Seat*

of Christ, that every one may receive the Things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad; 2 Cor. v. 10. There will be no fresh Tryal made of us in the next World, nor will the Multiplicity of Affairs to be inspected in the Judgment, occasion any Mistake in the Administration. God will not forget which was *almost*, and which *altogether* a Christian, and so change their Portions; but what a Man was found to be at Death, that he shall appear to be, at the Judgment, and be treated to Eternity as he was ready, or *unready*, when his Lord came. If you compare the 23d and 24th Verses of the 16th of *Luke*, you will find that the *first* carries us to the Grave of that hard-hearted Miser treated of in that Chapter: and the very next, to the *Hell*, where the *Ungodly* appear. He died a Christless Creature; and tho there was a Change in his Circumstances, upon his receiving the Wages of Sin, yet there was no Alteration in the After-state of his Soul. The foolish Virgins, mention'd in my Text, were for making some sort of Provision for Death, when they found that they could live no longer; tho' they were fundamentally defective in their Preparations, and being caught *unready*, there is no other Time or Place, for getting the necessary Preparedness.

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ness. They are shut out, and Entrance in-
to Heaven is deny'd them for ever.

What is included in the Account which
our Lord gives of their future State, who
lived and died Christian Infidels, is the

Second Particular, we promis'd to enquire
into. Indeed, this is rather a *negative* De-
scription of their Condition after Death,
than a direct and *positive* one: it rather
points at what they shall lose, than what
they shall suffer: but we may conclude that
the *positive* Part of their Punishment is intend-
ed, when the *negative* Part only is express'd.
This Rule must be admitted, or we shall
but lamely interpret many important Ar-
ticles, in the Revelation God has given us.
You know that *five* out of the *six* Com-
mandments, which include the Duties of
the second Table, are *negative* Precepts;
tho' they are allow'd to enjoin the Duties,
which are the Reverse to the *Sins* they
prohibit: and this Remark will hold good
in many other Instances.

I will give you this short View of
their Case in the next World, whom Christ
shall find *unready*, at his coming to them, by
Death.

1st, They shall be excluded Heaven, and
whatever is entertaining there. They are
represented, as saying, Lord, OPEN to us;
to let us know, that when these foolish Vir-

gins

gins came looking for Mercy, *the Door was shut*. Heaven is call'd *the Inheritance of the Saints*, Col. i. 12. i. e. as the same Apostle explains it, *the Inheritance of them that are sanctify'd*; Act. xx. 32. This *holy City* is so appropriated to the Use and Entertainment of such as are perfect in *Holiness*, that *Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor can Corruption inherit Incorruption*; 1 Cor. xv. 50. These Words refer more immediately to the *natural Incapacity* of even the *Believer* himself, till he receives a *Spiritual Body*, for what is seen, done, and enjoy'd above; yet 'tis strictly true, in regard of the *moral Incapacity* of an *Hypocrite*: for *Flesh and Blood* do usually describe human Nature in its unregenerate Condition. Now, how distressful the Case, that when the Soul is driven from all that was desirable to it upon Earth, it should find the Gate of Paradise (the Seat of Light, and Life, and Love, and Joy) guarded by a *flaming Sword*, to render it inaccessible! to be exil'd from that Presence that is to Eternity a Spring of new and satisfying Delights, to the glorified Multitude! and ever feel the resistless Force of this Prohibition, in reference to every Part of their Felicity, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*! Especially remembering that there is no middle World between Heaven, and Hell; but, all such to whom this *Light* is

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unapproachable, are overwhelm'd with
outer Darkness.

With what Horror and Anguish will it fill Conscience, when the Mind shall be hurry'd with such Reflections as these? It was my keeping up a *Shew* of Christianity, will the Soul say, while I was heedless and indifferent about the *Thing*, that has lost me this Heaven, and thus confounded and disappointed my Hopes. This is what I *Talk'd* of, and *pretended* to seek in the *right Place*, but *practically* made light of it: and now, when every Place beside, is the *Habitation* of Cruelty, full of Sorrow and Pain, and no where else that I can find Rest for the Sole of my Foot, I am judged unworthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. If I had been, and done, what I was willing the World should believe, that I was, and did, my Condition had now been *easy*, as it is *distracting*: but to have exchange'd these Joys, that Glory; a Happiness so full, suitable, satisfying, for these Horrors, this Disgrace, Misery, Damnation, how prodigious the Folly! These Thoughts are *Worms*, *Fire*, *Whips*, *Scorpions*, Enrage, and Torment. They must do so, for Conscience is now rous'd, and let loose as an Executioner of divine Vengeance.

To aggravate this Unhappiness, I observe, 2dly, From the Account given in my Text, that Prayers and Tears shall be ineffectual,

effectual, for the least Alleviation of their Doom. They *call'd him Lord, Lord!* tho' they *did not the Things which he said*: and here are they introduced, as pleading their Knowledge of the Judge, and soliciting with the most passionate Earnestness, that their Banishment may not be everlasting: yet they sue, and cry in vain. If you compare vii *Mat.* 21, 22, 23. with the xiii *Luk.* from the 25. (in which Passages you have a general Draught of the Judgment) you will find that our Lord mentions several other Pleas, that will be urg'd upon that awful Occasion. There is an obvious *Gradation* in their Arguments; and each Supplicant seems to offer somewhat more strong in his Favour, than t'other, as he has his Turn to plead. Says one, Lord, I lived under the Sound of thy Gospel, *thou hast taught in our Streets*: let this prevail for the shewing me Mercy. Says another, I bore thy Name, and was in Possession of all the Privileges of thine House: *he says that thou hast taught in his Streets*; but I can say more, for I have *eat and drank in thy Presence*. Says a third, I not only bore the Title of a *Christian*, but was honour'd with the Character of a Minister: *I have prophesy'd in thy Name*. A Fourth carries the Point yet further: I had the Faith of *Miracles*, in thy Name have cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works.

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Each of them advance their Pleas in bar of the *Perpetuity* of their Misery; that if the *Door* should continue *shut* for a while, it might not be shut so, as to be open'd no more for ever. But we find that the Judge is unmov'd at their most earnest Entreaties, and the same tremendous Sentence determines their common Doom: *Depart from me.* Pursuant to this, the Apostle John tells us, that *into the new Jerusalem, in No WISE enters any thing that defileth*; Rev. xxi. 27. in No WISE, not tho⁵ they should weep, as it were, *Drops of Blood to the Ground*; in the most affecting manner possible, beseech and plead. The Judge is *inexorable*, and the Sentence must take place in the whole of its comprehensive Woe; and is it not dreadful in the very *Mention*? for it runs thus, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels*; Mat. xxv. 41, 46. The Apostle to the *Thessalonians* says, that all such who obey not the Gospel of Christ, shall be punished with everlasting Destruction, from the Presence of the Lord; 1 Thess. i. 8, 9. There is no retreating from God's essential Presence; such as have *their Bed in Hell*, find him there: but they lose God's Presence as a refreshing Light, to bear it for ever, as a consuming Fire. They are now, where the *Worm dies not*, and where the Fire is not quenched.

3dly, It is further intimated in my Text, as to the future State of hypocritical Professors, that they shall be under immediate Impressions of divine Wrath, which is the Complement of the *second Death*. When he says, *I know you not*, this respects not any Defect in our Redeemer's Knowledge, for *he knows all things*; but an eternal Suspension of his Favour from these lost Creatures. Nay, 'tis *q. d.* I know you not, as filled with *Bowels of Mercy*, but the *Terrors* of incensed Justice; not as a *Saviour*, but as an *Avenger*. And if the *Felicity* of glorify'd Spirits is influenc'd by the immediate Impressions they receive from the *Father of Lights*; what forbids our supposing that *Damnation* receives its full Emphasis, from as immediate Impressions of divine Wrath? This is not obscurely deliver'd by the Prophet *Isaiah*, xxxth Chap. 33. where he tells us, *that Tophet is ordain'd of old, that it's deep, and large: the Pile thereof, Fire and much Wood; and that the BREATH OF THE LORD, like a Steam of Brimstone, doth kindle it*. But it is abundantly plain, from those Passages in which the Misery of the Damned is summed up in this, that *the Wrath of God does abide upon them*. This is expressly asserted, *John* iii. 36. To be eternally depriv'd of God's Loving-Kindness, does constitute a State that is truly and properly wretched: To be haunted eternally with the Rebukes,
and

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and Condemnings of an angry Breast, beats the Furnace some Degrees hotter : But if the Psalmist could say, who felt them in measure, *While I suffer thy Terrors, I am distracted*; what is their Case, upon whom Vengeance is come to the uttermost; upon whose Head, whole Vials of Wrath are pour'd forth? To whom are wrung out the very Dregs of the Cup of Trembling and Affliction? To have an everlasting Day of Wrath, and fresh Revelations of this Wrath everlastingly, carries in it the Idea of a Wretchedness that is complete.

All this is included in our Saviour's saying *I know you not*; it is *q. d.* I do not so know you, as to shew you any Mercy: I do not know you so as to abate in any Instance, my resistless almighty Vengeance.

Let me now, in the

Third Place, shew you how consistent it is with the Perfection of the Divine Nature, that Things should proceed in this Method,

For illustrating this Point, let me say,

(1.) It is every way worthy of God, thus to shut out of Heaven, all such who practically refus'd it. In his Word he has given us a Sketch of that Heaven, which is the Habitation of his Holiness and Glory, not meerly to excite our Wonder, but provoke our Desires: for he offers, and in

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Covenant Way secures this, to all, who by a *patient Continuance in well-doing, look for it.* Now, however lavish a Man may be in his *Commendations* of that distant invisible Good, if the Consent of his *Will* is never gain'd for God, if he *yields not the Obedience of Faith*, if he does not thankfully and cheerfully look for this Heaven, in the *Gospel Way*, 'tis fairly imputed to him that he *refuses* it. And does it break in upon the Glory of divine *Wisdom*? or throw the least Dishonour upon either the *Goodness*, or *Justice* of God, to accept the Refusal? That the *profane Person* should be rejected; who, afterwards, would inherit the Blessing, which he had sold for a *Morsel of Meat*? Heb. xii. 16, 17. When our Lord shall be able to say to those formal Professors, *Ye would not come to me, that ye might have Life*; with the utmost Safety to all the Excellencies of his Nature, he may say further, I forbear any more Tenders of this undervalued Blessing, and you *shall never see Life*. I forbid you the *Heaven*, which you now seek as a Shelter from *Hell*; but slighted when propos'd, as the Seat of sinless *Purity*, and the Residence of *God*. The Righteousness of this Sentence, will be applauded by Angels and Men.

For the further Illustration of this, I add,
(2.) It cannot be injurious to any of the divine Perfections, that such should
be

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be sent to *Hell*, who have freely *chose* it.

It may be said, That upon the Supposition of any Man's making such a preposterous *Choice*, being consider'd as a reasonable and free Creature, and in a State of Probation; this would obviate all Difficulties arising in prejudice of the divine Administration, tho God should thus issue Things, in reference to this particular Man. But there are not any Instances of Human Nature being thus far abandon'd; 'tis begging the Question, to say that they *chuse* *Hell*, and have the Part they *chose*.

I answer, in God's Way of interpreting Things, (and this must determine the Case) he supposes that there is a Language in our *Actions*, which is expressive and intelligible. Accordingly, God makes that Man to be guilty in the present Instance, who may not have *directly* and *intentionally* resolv'd on so wild a Choice. To support this Assertion, I'll shew you that this is a *ru'd Case*; look to *Prov. viii. 36. He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own Soul; all they that HATE ME, LOVE DEATH.* Death is not *formally* and *intentionally* the Object of their Love, but *interpretatively* it is: for he may be said to love and *chuse* the *End*, who loves and *chuses* the *Means* which stand in a natural and necessary Connection

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tion with it. Now, when this is not said in a *Corner*, but upon the *House-Top*, when God has left it upon *record*, for the Information of each successive Generation of Men, that he will proceed according to *this* Rule, in the Judgment he issues concerning them; this fastens the Guilt, makes it still more plainly a Matter of *Choice*, to the desperate Creature who undoes himself. Having set *Life and Death before us, Blessing and Cursing*; is it unworthy of God, to give us the Part we have freely chosen?

Again,

If the Objection be started upon the foot of the *Eternity* of the Sinner's Punishment; and the Righteousness of God be challeng'd, upon the apprehended *Disproportion* between the *Penalty* and the *Offence*; what has been said already is a sufficient Reply. For if I chuse Sin, when forbid upon the pain of everlasting Damnation, it's plain that I chuse that everlasting Damnation; and then the Matter returns to *this* again, *viz.* Whether it is unworthy of a righteous God to give a free Creature the part he chuses?

But further,

We do allow that to be *equal* among Men, which we brand with the infamous Imputation of *Unrighteousness* in God. Treason may be perpetrated in an instant, and yet by the Law, the Traytor is never to recover

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ver the Life which he has hereby forfeited. Nay, *his Blood* is not accounted an Equivalent to his Crime, but *his Children's Teeth* are set on edge by the Grapes which he has eaten. God himself tells us, that he renders to every Man according to his Works. There can therefore be no erring from the Rules of Justice in his Administration. And until we can comprehend the infinite Majesty of God, the infinite Purity and Righteousness of his Law, his absolute Propriety in his Creatures, we cannot form adequate Conceptions of Sin's Malignity; and even upon this account run a bold venture in saying, that its Punishment is unequal to its Guilt.

Upon the whole,

God has threaten'd Sin with everlasting Punishment; and admitting for Argument's sake, that we could not account for this, we deserve not the Name of Christians, if this alone could not satisfy, viz. that there can be no Unrighteousness with him.

Fourthly, We are now to apply this Discourse, which was the last Head proposed. And,

(1.) What Terror does this Doctrine speak to such, who under a Profession of Religion, are Strangers to the Grace of God. The Sinners in Zion may be afraid, and Fearfulness seize the Hypocrite in Heart, for who of them can dwell with the devouring Fire? Who

among

among them dwell with everlasting Burnings? Isa. xxxiii. 14. How justly is Destruction from God a Terror to such? Job xxxi. 23. He says, Behold all ye who kindle a Fire, that compass yourselves about with Sparks; walk in the Light of your Fire, and in the Sparks that ye have kindled. This shall you have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in Sorrow: Isa. l. 11.

That you may be rightly affected with your own Case, let the following Particulars be allowed a Place in your Thoughts.

1st, Think what it is you put to the hazard, by your Insincerity in the great Affair of Religion. The Stake is nothing less than Heaven, that undefiled and incorruptible Inheritance, beyond which our Minds can conceive nothing that is either great or delightful. God requires you to seek this Kingdom in the FIRST place. Not only to set about it early in Life, but with a most intense Application. Why? because the chief Good challenges our principal Regard. But you reject the Counsel of God against yourselves. And when your Spirits are dispossessed of their present Habitation, to have no Heaven to entertain them, how very unhappy such a Circumstance! To be friendless upon your launching into the eternal World of Spirits, and find a despised Heaven barred against you for ever, the Character you now bear, the Privileges you now enjoy, vainly pleaded; O can you think of this being your own

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own Case, and not cry out, *Wretched Man*
that I am? Think,

2dly, For what it is that you put such things as these in jeopardy. To act up to your Character as *rational*, you should give the *Preference* to the *best* things : Those that are most worthy in themselves, and most necessary to your Happiness. One would think that to satisfy Conscience, you should make it appear that they are *Trifles* which you hazard, if compared with the part you chuse. This would justify the Conduct, and nothing less can do it. Well, let us set the things you secure by a Profession, against those that you hazard by being *only* Professors ; and then see how the Account will stand. By your Profession you are supposed to have *Life* ; by being *only* Professors, you continue under the Power of *Death*. By your Profession you make up a *fictitious* Peace, by a meer Profession forfeit the *Peace of God*. By your Profession, you may get more of *this World* ; by Insincerity in that Profession, you lose *Life everlasting*. You hazard the Approbation of God, for the Applause of Men ; a *real* for an *imaginary* Peace ; *Heaven for Earth*. Whether this be acting *circumspectly*, not as *Fools*, but as *Wise*, judge ye. Think,

3dly, What are the positive *Evils* to which you lay yourself open by such a Conduct. A real Christian is blessed in *Life*,
and

and Death, and for ever; an Hypocrite lives and dies under the Character of a *Child of Wrath*, and is to be a Victim to Divine Vengeance to Eternity. Christ pronounces him *accursed* when he sentences him to *depart*, to intimate that he is so at present, and to make him eminently so for ever. Don't flatter yourself that Hell is a *painted Fire*, its Tortures visionary, or that the Mercy of God will over-rule your Punishment, so as that it shall be less intense or durable. This is imputing to him a Weakness; an Insult upon his Faithfulness, his Justice, and the Immutability of his Nature. Now, do you not only make a Forfeiture of Heaven, but a Purchase of Hell, by a Profession that is separated from practical Christianity? And ought Ministers to *soften* or *conceal* the Terror that belongs to you? Can they do it without treacherously *keeping back from you* part of the Counsel of God?

(2) If it is to fare with the Sinner to all Eternity, according to the State of his Soul at Death, then as we dread *everlasting Destruction*, and desire immortal Blessedness, let us lay a good Foundation against the time to come. It should fill us with the Praises of our God, that he has not cut short his Work in Righteousness with us, that it is still the *accepted time*, and the *Day of Salvation*; to-day, while it is called to-day, if we harden not

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our Hearts. But if we continue in Sin, while this Grace does abound towards us, this will be resented as a despising God's Patience and Forbearance, and we shall treasure up to ourselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath. Let us follow God with our strong Cries, resolve to give him no Rest Day or Night, till he shall receive us graciously, love us freely, form Christ within us, and possess us of the Spirit of his Son. Till this is our Case, our Life is a Dream, and we are very unfit to die. If we have a Concern of Heart about this matter, are humbled to the Dust at God's Feet, that we have been so long Cumberers of the Ground, if we continue to have such an Anxiety and Solitude about pure and undefiled Religion; he that hath wrought us to this self-same thing, is God. Our willing as well as doing aright, we owe to his good Pleasure. We may look upon what his Hand has already wrought as a Token for Good, as a Pledge of further and greater Blessings: That in inclining our Hearts to seek, he has done it with a Design of attending to the Voice of our Supplication, that he might not spare his Son, and with him might freely give us all things.

I would recommend this Advice by the following *Motives*. They will have their weight, if duly consider'd.

1st, Consider how very soon Death may overtake you. We are all Tenants at Will,

are turned out at the Pleasure of the great Lord of Life. It is at our peril that we postpone this Affair, and say to it, *Go thy way for the present, at a more convenient Season we will send for thee.* Nay, this is invading the Divine Prerogative, *For it is not for us to know the Times and Seasons; this the Father has reserved in his own power.* And to check Presumption of this kind, we are told, that we cannot so much as say *what shall be on the morrow.* Shall a Moment be lost then, when our Salvation depends upon the right Improvement of Life; and of this whole Life we are not able to cail any more than the present *NOW* our own?

Consider,

2dly, That your neglecting this Call which God has given you, may make your Death less easy, and your Account more dreadful. Should you stifle any Convictions which may have broke in upon your Minds, by the Blessing of God upon what you have now heard; forbear to put in execution the Purposes form'd in favour of God, and your Souls, as you do the Devil the greatest Pleasure, so you may find when Death comes, that you have doubly arm'd that *King of Terrors.* As your Guilt will be hereby aggravated, so your Condemnation will be more severe in the next World.

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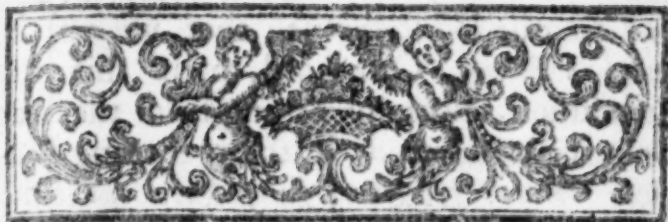
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You are invited to serve yourselves, to provide against the most shocking Extremities; I have been endeavouring to *help your Hope and Joy*: but we must leave them in God's hands, to make what has been deliver'd *the Words of Eternal Life.*



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S E R M O N VI.

Hiding our Death, a Call to Watchfulness.



WE are to stand or fall for ever, as ready or unready at Christ's coming. The Christian passes by Death into *Fullness of Joy*; Hypocrites suffer by Death the Punishment of *Loss*, and the Punishment of *Sense*; miss Heaven, and are cast into the *Lake of Fire*. Inlarging on these Heads, lets us into the Subject contain'd in the *IVth Proposition*.

There is one more behind, which may profitably employ our present Thoughts. 'Tis this :

V Prop. That our being left in the dark about the Time of our Death, and the
Judg-

Judgment Day, when assured of the Certainty of both, should be a sufficient Motive to our *Watchfulness*, that we may be *found in Peace*. Our Lord infers this as a Conclusion naturally arising from the main Doctrine treated of in the preceding Parable: *Watch therefore, for ye know not either the Day, or the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

What Man can believe that there is an Event before him, in which the Welfare of a Soul for Eternity is concerned, one that is infallibly certain, and cannot but come to pass, may take place the next Year, or Month, or Week, or Day, or Moment, and which of them a Secret to him; what Man that thinks (with this State of the Case in his View) who must not own that the Advice carries Strength and Propriety in it, when he is put upon a constant Expectation of what may overtake him in an instant? It is giving up the Character of a *Man* and a *Christian* at once; and offering Violence to the Light of *Reason* as well as *Revelation*, to refuse being determined by such Evidence as this.

In the further Prosecution of this Doctrine, I shall endeavour,

First, To explain the Nature of this Duty, for the more effectual Recommendation of which, this Parable is instituted by our Lord.

Secondly,

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Secondly, Shew you the Force of this Reasoning, when this Duty is urged from the Consideration of *the Son of Man's coming in a Day, and at an Hour, that we know not of.*

Thirdly, Offer something for vindicating the Divine Conduct, in thus hiding from us the Time of our Death. We shall then add,

Fourthly, Such Practical Reflections as may be a fit Close to this Subject.

First, Let us enquire into the Nature of this Duty, with a View to the recommending which, our Saviour institutes this Parable. To proceed with greater Clearness, suffer me to re-assume this one Observation, *viz.* That as in the Chapter before my Text, Christ had been pressing *Watchfulness* upon his Disciples, as that was opposed to *Intemperance*, the giving into Luxury, and a brutish Indulgence of the Passions and Appetites; so in this Chapter he inculcates the same Duty, but taken in opposition to *Security*, and as consisting in a *Readiness* to meet him at his coming. If you compare what occurs from the 37th Verse of the foregoing Chapter, with what is offer'd in the 13th Verse of *this* Chapter, in its Connection with the Context, you will see that there is room for this Distinc-

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tion.

tion. This Duty was not limited in its Obligation to the *Disciples* of our Lord, nor to such as were *Israelites according to the Flesh*, but equally concerns all who have heard of his Name, and are begotten to the Hope of Christ's second coming. This *Scripture is not of private Interpretation*; but what is said to one, is said to all of us, *Watch*.

There are these two things supposed in the *Watchfulness* which my Text mentions, viz. our avoiding whatever either in the way of Amusement, or Incumbrance, may make us unready for the coming of our Lord; and the exercising ourselves to whatever may forward our Preparedness to meet him.

In the *Watchfulness* which my Text mentions, there is supposed,

(1.) Our avoiding whatever either as an *Amusement* or *Incumbrance* may make us less ready for our Lord's coming. Considering our present Circumstances and Situation, as Spirits in Flesh, surrounded with so great a Variety of Objects, which by the Sense gain Admittance to the *Heart*, it becomes us to *fear always*. Without this Guard upon ourselves, it will be next to impossible not to run into such an Intimacy with the World, as will prejudice our Correspondence with a better; and to get into the

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way of living, which will hazard our dying in Peace. He who made this World, and perfectly knows the Power of *things present* to inſnare corrupt Nature, has often caution'd us to be upon our Watch, if we would not be *overcome by Evil*. This Reſtraint upon us, flows from the Infiniteness of *Wisdom* and *Goodness* there is in God, and is by no means an Act of absolute Sovereignty.

I ſhall inſtance in two Particulars, whence good Men are in danger of being unready for Chriſt's coming; againſt both which they ſhould exerciſe themſelves to this *Watchfulness*. The

1^{ſt} is, Launching out into a ſort of *boundleſs* Purſuit of the World. There is a great deal of Danger from unbleſſ'd Proſperity. A Man of vaſt Diſcernment, among other Remarks he had made upon the ordinary Courſe of Things, obſerves to *have ſeen Riches given to the Owners of them to their HURT*. I ſaid, *unbleſſ'd* or unſanctify'd Proſperity, for *neither Love nor Hatred is to be known by theſe things under the Sun*; Eccleſ. ix. 1. *When Riches encrease, Men are apt to ſet their Hearts upon them*; to pull hard, when they find that the World is coming; and ſpread all their Sails, while the Wind is favourable. So true is it, that *they who love Silver, are not ſatisfy'd with Silver*; or he

that loveth Abundance, with Increase: Eccles. v. 10. How many think, and plod, and hurry, and labour, *bereaving their Souls of Good*, whose Pretence, should you caution them against overdoing the Matter, amounts only to this, *viz.* They are providing for their Families, and by their present Assiduity striving to get the sooner thro this fatiguing way of Life? However *plausible* this Excuse may appear upon the first hearing, yet if we weigh it in our Thoughts, and remember that no Employment of Life is justifiable, which hinders the principal Design of Life, unfits us for dying, and entering triumphantly into Heaven; it will be judged *weak* and trifling.

I may shew you without difficulty, that while we conduct ourselves thus, we must be unavoidably entangled; our *Spiritual Affairs* suffering in proportion to our Over-Concern for *Temporal Things*. For,

1. We must of necessity, by such a Respect for this World, often break in upon the *Time* which we owe to better Things. There needs no labour'd Proof of this Remark, the Truth of which is attested by Experience. Granting that such a Care for my Family as to *Temporals*, does not wholly divert the Care I should take of their *Souls*, that mine is not a *Prayerless House*, notwithstanding this Croud of Business (and
would

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would to God that this might be safely allowed as to all *professing Families*) there is much more than this, which is my daily Duty as a Christian. For instance, serious Self-Reflection, going into mine own Heart, comparing what I have been and done the Day that is past, with that perfect Rule, to which both Heart and Actions should be conform'd. Conversing with Heaven in private; our native Soil, our Father's House. There are many things which may not be properly communicated to a Family, that must not be forgotten when God and the Soul are together. These are not left to our *Courtesy*, to be done or forbore at our pleasure: They are *Duties* which we owe, and God expects. Now, as far as this eager Prosecution of the World, and imbarking thus extravagantly in its Affairs, rob us of the *Time* which such Services as these do require; so far are we hereby render'd less ready for our Lord's coming. The *laying aside such a Weight*, the avoiding such an *Incumbrance*, must in course be referred to, in the *Watchfulness* here recommended. Christ himself explains it thus, when he sets it in opposition to such an *Overchargedness with the Cares of this Life*, as renders it but too possible for *that Day to come upon us unawares*. And I take the Apostle Paul to have had the same Sense of Things, when he

makes *Watchfulness* and *Sobriety* to be Terms of the same Import. As does also the Apostle *Peter*. Compare *1 Thess.* v. 6. with *1 Pet.* iv. 7. The *Sobriety* of which they both speak, intimates *Moderation* and *Temperance* in our Regards for these present perishing Things.

2. As such a Concern for this World should be avoided upon the account of the Incroachments it makes on the *Time* which we owe to better things, it should also as it *indisposes* the Mind for Entertainments that are spiritual and divine. Thus does it further unfit us for Christ's coming. We must not only see that Duty is *done*, but make Conscience of the *Manner* of doing it, if we would thrive in Grace and Comfort. An Action that is *materially* good, may be *circumstantially* evil. If it do not spring from a right *Principle*, if it is not regular in its *Aims*, and directed to the proper *End* (and these things fall under the Divine Cognizance) the Service may be condemned of God, which meets with the universal Applause of Men. It is not enough that I confess the Sins of the Day, if I experience not the Workings of Gospel-Repentance. That I acknowledge the personal and relative Blessings conferred, if my Heart is unaffected with the Bounty of Heaven. That I talk of my Grave, if I die not to this World,

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World, as I am dying out of it; or the Glories of Heaven, if I feel not *the Powers of the World to come.* Now, admitting that the Man, whose Life is such a continued Hurry, does reserve some of his *Time* for God; with how great Disadvantage does he sequester to the Affairs of Religion, whose Mind is stuff'd with the Remembrance of the past Day's Business, and the Projects to be executed the next? 'Tis to be fear'd, that *his Heart is removed far from him*, while he is *honouring him with his Lips*; and of all such God says, that *in vain do they worship him.* Is that Man in a fit posture to *die*, who is out of frame to *pray*? And can any thing excuse thy being out of tune, Christian, to the *one thing needful*? Thy being indisposed for what is, and should be the main Concern of Life? When Christ recommends to you a *Watching* for his coming, he must certainly caution you against these *Incumbrances*, which so directly unfit you for it.

So much for the First Particular.

(2.) By their unlawful Love of lawful Things; have good Men been in danger of Unreadiness for Christ's coming. They may have learnt to abridge their Desires, to pity the restless Ambition, or insatiable Avarice, too visible in other Men's Conduct, and the same time be themselves in Bondage

to the Creature. While they have seen no Happiness in the part which the Worldling acts in Life, they have felt a Pleasure which has been *excessive* in the Review of their own Circumstances; and a Man may be an *Idolater*, who possesses very little of the World. As this has been explained in the Apostolical Writings, we find that the Charge of Idolatry may be brought against us, whenever the little we enjoy has too large a place in our Hearts, or our Hopes of Happiness from it are beyond what we ought to encourage from *broken and empty Cisterns*. This is *the Love to the World, and the Things of the World*, which the Scriptures condemn; and if it were not that we are prone to such Extravagance in our Regards for these things, and that such a misplacing of our Affections drew along with it a Variety of Inconveniences, we should not be warned against the very same thing so frequently as we are, especially in the New Testament. We need Help from Heaven to love what God allows us to love, within the proper *Limits* by which he has bounded our Respect to all sublunary Good. Not to transgress the *Measure* which is lawful, or impropriate what should be sacred to God alone.

We should beware of this, as we would guard against what will contribute to our *Unreadiness* for our Lord's coming.

This

This will do it,

1. By obstructing the Exercise of our *Faith*. When this is our governing Principle, it scatters the Mists which intercept our Views of Heaven; representing eternal things not as *real* only, but *near*. It brings within our sight *Death* as well as *Immortality*, as the *Jordan* thro which we are to pass, to the *Land flowing with Milk and Honey*. It at once keeps alive the Thought of *Dying*, and divests it of its Terror; ay, *out of the Eater brings forth Meat, and out of the Strong, Sweetness*. Thus it is a Preservative against Sin, and provokes to universal Duty, making our Lives a constant, practical, entertaining Intimacy with the Grave. Now, must not such be *ready* for Christ's coming, who thus *pass the time of their sojourning here in his fear*?

Setting our Affections on things below, shews that we are but little influenced by that *Faith, which is the Evidence* (ἐκείνη, the Demonstration) of invisible Objects; and as far as it prevails, will *hinder* the Actings and Exercise of that Grace in the Soul. The loading ourselves with *thick Clay*, must unfit us for mounting as *with Eagles Wings towards Heaven*. If answerable to our Unacquaintedness with *Death*, is our want of actual Preparation for *Dying*, and an undue Regard for lawful things thus indisposes

the Mind, by putting it from under the Influence of that Faith, which should be our governing Principle; sure this is to be avoided, as we hope to be found ready.

2. As our *Faith* is hurt hereby, and so our Readiness for Christ's coming obstructed; we are further hindred by the Excess of our Love even to lawful things, as we lose hereby a *Relish* and *Love* for what are most important. Our Love to God, and Divine Objects, when it prevails, has a *constraining Power*. We chuse to converse with the things, which we superlatively love; and as these are uppermost in our Thoughts, *Life* or *Practice* will be under an answerable Influence. We shall love to think of Death as the Gate of Life; dwell upon the Subject, as this is a necessary Preliminary to our enjoying what is most dear to us. Now, the more our Love is prostituted to *temporal* things, we shall find that it's more sparingly exercised upon *eternal* ones. Consequently we shall think less frequently of these things, and this discover itself in a proportion'd Conversation. Shan't we then guard against this *Idolatry*, not meerly from a Conscience of its *abstracted Guilt*, but the *Consequences* which attend it.

As our avoiding what would *unfit* us for a comfortable meeting with Christ, is one thing

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thing referred to, in our *Watching* for his coming; so it supposes,

2dly, That we exercise ourselves to whatever may forward our Preparedness to meet him. Our Lord supposes this Duty to be of a *positive* Nature, when to the Church of Sardis he says, *Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent, if thou shalt not WATCH, I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou shalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee: Rev. iii 3.* And Ch. xvi. 15. of the same Book, he says, *Behold I come as a Thief, blessed is he that WATCHETH, and keepeth his Garments.* This must be intended, when he bids us *watch and pray, that we enter not into Temptation.* Our Duty cannot be discharged by meer *Negatives*; it is not enough that we don't *sleep as do others*, when our being employ'd thro our whole Lives, in such Exercises as may make us, and keep us ready to die, is what *God the Lord requires.* Not that we are to be continually poring on the Grave, or as if we failed in our Duty, whenever we were from under an *actual* Sense of our Mortality. We shall acquit ourselves, so as to be accepted with Christ, if the following Description does agree to our general Conduct of Life.

1. If Heaven be a Place with which we maintain a constant Correspondence. When the Apostle says in the Names of all real
Chri-

Christians, *Our Conversation is in Heaven*, we should take heed that we do not mistake him. He does not make it inconsistent with true Piety, that this Conversation should be at any time *interrupted*; and our Thoughts, and Cares, and Labours, return to Earth, and earthly things. He would then speak of what no meer Creature did ever attain to, instead of his Assertion's being universally true. Nor would this be our Duty, tho possible, considering our present Circumstances; who have frail, crazy, needy *Bodies*, that claim a proper share in our Regard; tho we owe them an inferior one, to that which is due to our spiritual and immortal Part. He means, that as the Christian's general Walk is agreeable to his professed Expectation of Heaven, so hither he retires for his *chief Joys*, when free from what disturbed and interrupted such *Converse*; that he is as little a Stranger there as possible. He who keeps up such a Correspondence, is inured to the Thought of dying, and properly said to *watch* for Christ's coming, as he lives in that Heaven which is chiefly dear to him, for Christ's sake.

2. If, while in this World, we are learning to *leave* it, we practise the Duty which my Text recommends. No wonder if *their Faces gather Paleness, and Sorrow fills their Hearts*, to whose Minds Death has scarce
ever

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ever been present, till they see him coming to execute the Sentence of a broken Law. Good Men have found it of ill consequence, that they have made Death no more familiar to them, who, the more he is a Stranger, will appear the more terrible. They have upon this account felt fresh Agonies in dying; and taking them from this World, has been like *tearing the Caul of their Hearts in sunder*. He who makes it his daily Business to sit loose from present things, *rejoicing and weeping, as tho he neither wept nor rejoiced*; who respects them only as Conveniencies in his way, no part of the Happiness to which he aspired; that realizes to his own Mind the Necessity of Dying, the Nature of that hard Work, and lives in perfect Friendship with the Grave; that Man properly *watches* for Christ's coming, and cannot be unready at his Call.

3. If we see each Day of our Lives to keep all Accounts clear, and balanced between God and us, we shall be approved as having discharged *this Duty*. He who lets Matters run on unsettled, shews that he is not apprehensive of his being speedily called to a Reckoning; and he who dares not venture the Arrears of one day to be unadjusted, tells God and the World, that he looks every Night *when his Soul shall be required at his hands*. The Meeting will be terrible, when

when Death overtakes us unlook'd for, and tells us that we have not a Day to live, tho the Business of an whole Life to do. This makes his Visage ghastly, his Stroke heavy, puts Poison into his Sting, turns the last into a *fiery Tryal*. But he who has study'd the Knowledge of himself, whose Repentance has kept pace with the Discoveries of his Sin, who has made a fresh Choice of God daily, and a fresh Dedication of himself to his Service, (as every Day's Sins are a *virtual* Departure from him, and Renunciation of his Propriety in us) and a fresh Application of the *Blood of sprinkling*; as this Person can never be called unready, so he gives abundant Evidence of his *watching* for the coming of Christ.

This is all I shall offer upon the First Head, for explaining the Duty of *Watchfulness*, as it is recommended in the Text. It supposes our avoiding whatever either as Amusement or Incumbrance might make us less *ready*; and the exercising ourselves to whatever may *forward* our Preparedness to meet Christ at his coming.

Secondly, I am now to shew you the Force of the Reasoning, when this Duty is urged from the Consideration of the *Son of Man coming in a Day, and at an Hour that we know*

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not. This Duty is frequently pressed by the very same Motive. The Thought is the same, when Christ says, *Ye know not when the Master of the House cometh, at Even, or at Midnight, or at Cockcrow, or in the Morning, therefore watch; Mark xiii. 35.* and when, as in the just mention'd Rev. iii. 3. he enforces it, from his coming as a Thief.

I take the Substance of the Argument to be summed up in these Particulars: *q. d.* Your Unwatchfulness cannot prevent my Coming. It will rob you of their Comfort, whom I shall find ready: And make it a terrible Coming to you.

In his recommending this Duty, we must suppose our Lord to say,

1st, Your Unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming, it is therefore wise in you to expect it. *All your times are in my hands,* your Removal out of Life depends not upon your Choice, but my Pleasure. Since Unthoughtfulness of Death is no Security against it, how unreasonable your Disobedience to this particular Command? Remember that I came, and took those away, who were eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in Marriage, in the old World. Made quick work with them, sweeping the whole human Race into Eternity by a preternatural Deluge, one Family excepted; therefore watch. You see from that awful Instance,
to

to which I refer you, that you are not the more safe by forgetting your Danger. Never were they less apprehensive of Death, than when their *Destruction* came upon them.

To carry the Thread of the Argument, it is *q. d.* further;

2dly, Tho your Unwatchfulness cannot prevent my coming, yet it will deprive you of their Comfort, whom I shall find ready. *Who is the Faithful and Wise Servant* (says Christ) *whom his Lord has made Ruler over his Household, to give them Meat in due Season? Blessed is that Servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, he shall make him Ruler over all his Goods; Mat. xxiv. 45, 46, 47.* My coming *q. d.* will make such Persons amends, who regularly expect it; and since Unwatchfulness defends not from Death, and yet makes a Forfeiture of so comprehensive a Blessing, whether is greater, the Folly or the Wickedness of this Conduct? If you would go with me to the Marriage, let me find you ready. Come I shall, and I will do such, very particular Favours, who love mine appearing; think therefore, whether it be not Motive sufficient to continued Watchfulness, when so much is hazarded by a contrary Behaviour?

To compleat the Argument, we may suppose our Lord to say,

3dly, When

3dly, When I come, be it sooner or later, if you are not upon the *Watch*, it will be a terrible coming to you. Somewhat of this sort is referred to, when Christ says, *Watch ye therefore, lest coming suddenly, I find you sleeping*, Mark xiii. 35, 36. There is a threatening of Woe to the *Unwatchful*, wrapt up in those Expressions. And if you look to xxiv *Mat.* from the 48th, you will find there a very explicit Declaration of the Vengeance which shall overtake them: *The Lord of the evil Servant will come when he is not aware of it, and cut him asunder, appointing him the Hypocrite's Portion.*

Upon the whole, the Master is set in this light: *q. d.* Tho I tell you not when I shall come, on what *Day*, or in what *Hour*, yet I have given assurance to all, that I will come; I urge your watching for that time, whenever it shall be, from the Consideration of the *Good* you shall lose, and the *Evil* you shall suffer, if otherwise employ'd at my coming.

Thirdly, I shall now endeavour to vindicate the Divine Conduct in this Disposal of things.

Should it be said, that by keeping us in the dark as to this Matter, we are deprived of the most proper *Motive* to Duty; and that in order to our being in a constant
Readiness

Readiness for such an Event, it would have been better if every Person exactly knew the Period of his Life, and when he should be called into Judgment :

I shall reply to this Objection in the following Particulars.

1st, God can do nothing but what is *best*, therefore his having put our Affairs upon another foot, concludes that his Work is not to be *mended*, or the Designs he has in view more effectually attained in another way. The rich Man in the Gospel told *Abraham*, that God took the less proper Method for reducing the World to his Obedience, that a Messenger from the invisible State would do much more by his Testimony for the Conviction of Mankind, than could be expected from the Ordinance of Preaching; but *Abraham* assured him, that the Creature was very unfit to correct the Conduct of his Maker, in saying, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded, tho one rose from the Dead*: Luke xvi. ult.

2^{dly}, There are obvious Inconveniencies would attend our having such a Knowledge of the time of our Death and Judgment. It is not improbable it might prove a dangerous Temptation to a good Man; slacken his Pace, and abate his Diligence, to see a large Space between him and Death. And

on

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on the other hand, that his beholding himself upon the very Brink of Eternity, might so swallow up his Time, and Thoughts, and Cares, as that his *Personal* should break in upon the *Relative* and *Social* Duties, which are bound upon Conscience, by the same Authority.

And as to a wicked Man, as his Heart would be more fully set in him to do wickedly, when he saw that Sentence against his evil Deeds was not to be executed speedily; the seeing himself within the Shadow of Death would make him desperate: and so his Circumstances be worse than now they are, whether his Time were longer or shorter in the World.

3dly, Taking our Case as it now stands, we have the most rational Motive to continued *Watchfulness*. There is no room for a moment's Intermission of this Duty for Security or Slumber, because we know not but our last Sands may be running, and after a few Pulses more, the *Silver Cord* shall be broken. And our not knowing but that we may have Years to come, secures us against that troublesome Concern, that might embitter our short Stay, did we see them waiting at the Door, who should carry us to the Grave. So that there seems to be a Mixture of Divine *Wisdom* and *Goodness* in the thing, when Christ commands us to
watch,

watch, because we KNOW NOT either the Day or Hour of his coming.

The whole of this Discourse has been *Practical*, which makes it less needful to enlarge in the *Application*.

However, we'll offer something under this

Fourth and last Head of Discourse. We cannot but observe from what has been said,

1. The Wisdom of being truly Religious. Such are provided against all Events; nothing can befall them which shall not *work together for their Good*. The *Watchfulness* of which we have spoken, is not to be consider'd as a *single Duty*, but as of a *complex* nature; taking into it Christianity itself, in all the Beauty and Perfection it can appear, in our present State. And are not they *wise* in a way of Distinction and Eminence, who being intended for another World, into which they are *certainly*, and they know not how *suddenly* to be removed, have laid in for whatever can happen to them? *To whom to live, is Christ; and to die, Gain? So that whether they live, they live unto the Lord; or whether they die, they die unto the Lord: whether therefore they live or die, they are the Lord's.* This is not indeed the *Wisdom of this World*; they are now too far prejudiced to give into

it,

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it, but 'tis what God applauds as *Wisdom*, and what (another day) the vilest of Men shall acknowledge to be so.

2. See hence the Folly and Danger of *Security*, when we know not what a Day may bring forth. O say not, *Worldling*, when such a Scheme is executed, and I have surmounted this and t'other Incumbrance, I will take care of my poor Soul; and I will then begin to study and practise Religion. Thy Soul is worth more than the whole World; and you are not sure, tho now in the Pride of *Life*, but that you may be *numbred among the Dead* before to-morrow: and in that Day will all these good Thoughts and Purposes perish. Youth, Health, Strength, protect not against the Assaults of the Grave. There are but few *hoary Heads* come there, but few worn out with Years and Infirmities, in comparison of such as *die in their full Strength*. As you would not be lost to *Eternity*, do not trifle away your present, short, uncertain Time.

Let *this* Thought keep you wakeful, *Christian*. Endeavour to live under this awful Sound, *Arise ye Dead, and come to Judgment*. Carry about with you the Thoughts of Death and Eternity, wherever you are, and whatever you do.

Among others, these two very good Effects will follow this.

1st, It

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1st, It will make your *Light to shine*. You cannot be vain, frothy, proud, censorious, worldly, while your Spirits are under the Command of such Thoughts. No, you'll be serious, humble, spiritual, heavenly, as these are in you, and abound. And while you are glorifying your Father in Heaven, you are promoting your own, your best Interest.

For,

2^{dly}, Your latter End will be better than your Beginning. The Day of your Death, better than the Day in which they said, *There is a Man-Child born*. When you are called to die, you will step out of this World into Heaven. You cannot be more ready to meet Christ, than you will find him ready to receive you. And O happy Souls, that leave weeping Friends, for the Embraces of the God of Love; the great God, your Saviour. You will find, when he carries you to your Father's House, that all your Watchings, Prayers, Tears, Labours of Love, your Afflictions, Tryals, Troubles, for the Name and Sake of this Saviour, are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in you.

F I N I S.

The Reader is desired to correct the following Typographical Errors:

P. 15. l. 11. read thro' the Influence. P. 41. l. 14. r. 1 John 2. 9. P. 42. l. 25. for they r. he. P. 48. l. 1. r. decks, and l. 11. Justifying. P. 89. l. 15. r. these things. P. 90. l. 13. r. 2 Tim. 4. 7, 8. P. 95. full Stop at Death. P. 106. l. 25. r. 2 Thess. 1. 8, 9.

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